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NAPOLEON'S NEMESIS

The Life of Baron Stein

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BARON STEIN

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The Life of Baron Stein

by

CONSTANTIN
DE GRUNWALD

Translated from the French by

CHARLES
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NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1936

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

IN the Valhalla of Germanic heroes Freiherr Karl von und zum Stein, Baron of the Empire, occupies one of the foremost places. A whole literature centres on him, his monuments adorn the public places, and every German school-child is taught to celebrate the imperishable glory of his patriotic achievement.

In France, on the other hand, Stein's name, although it figures in every history of the Napoleonic period, evokes no very distinct image. The general public knows almost nothing of the stormy life and the strange character of the man whom Albert Sorel, in his classic work *L'Europe et la Révolution française*, described as 'the greatest statesman of his country, and one of the noblest and most penetrating geniuses that has ever devoted itself to the management of men'.

The author has taken upon himself the task of filling this gap. Basing himself on the recent publications of the Berlin Staatsarchiv (still unknown to French historical students), and on his own researches in the archives of the Quai d'Orsay, he has attempted to paint the portrait of the great man who was the protagonist of the struggle against Napoleon, who regenerated Prussia and incidentally gave her the Saar, who was largely instrumental in restoring the Bourbons and incidentally governed awhile twenty Departments of France. Further, the author has sought to revive for the reader of to-day a period whose political preoccupations are in more than one respect identical with those of contemporary Europe. Revolution or tradition: European union or national autarchy: equalitarian state or corporative state: payment of 'reparations': clandestine rearmament: 'Anschluss' of Germany and Austria — all problems of burning actuality.

P R E F A C E

Napoleon, by his famous edict of Madrid, officially invested Stein with the title of 'Enemy of France' that no one else has borne, either before or since. Enemy — determined, obstinate and irreconcilable enemy — of the Emperor he certainly was, and no one can be surprised at it. What is more difficult to justify is the hatred that this impassioned fighter for the liberation of his country passed on to the French people in its entirety. But we must take Stein as he was, typical and representative of the Teutonic race, with its qualities and its defects, standard-bearer of the Imperial and national Germanic idea — a man of the sequence Luther — Bismarck — Hitler.

Pace M. Paul Valéry, the study of history discloses extremely valuable lessons. It is only by plunging again into the past, into the grandeurs and miseries of generations that have gone, that one can grasp the essential characters of a national soul.

The aspirations and cravings of the German people have rarely manifested themselves as clearly and as insistently as during the Napoleonic Wars wherein Stein lived and acted.

The Third Reich of our own day, picking up contact again with the ancient tradition, has restored the 'Spirit of 1813', canonized in Hindenburg's 'political testament', to its place of honour.

May it not be that the soul of contemporary Germany is dominated by the same elemental forces as those that once inspired the life and work of Stein?

The author, a Russian writer and a friend and guest of France, would feel happy if he has succeeded, in this book, in making his modest contribution towards the solution of this heart-straining problem.

This book has been written in close collaboration with Mme Jean de Savonnières, to whom the author's warmest

P R E F A C E

thanks are due. He must likewise thank M. Ph. Sagnac, Professor in the Faculty of Letters at Paris, M. G. Lefebvre, Professor in the same Faculty at Strasbourg, and the eminent biographer of Stein, M. G. Ritter, Professor in the University of Freiburg im Breisgau, alike for the wise advice and the documentation that he owes to them.

IMPERIAL DECREE

OF DECEMBER 1808

1. The person STEIN, who seeks to make trouble in Germany, is declared ENEMY OF FRANCE AND OF THE CONFEDERATION OF THE RHINE.

2. The property that the said Stein may possess either in France or in the territories of the Confederation of the Rhine will be sequestrated. The said Stein will be arrested wherever he may be found by Our troops or the troops of Our Allies.

Given at our Imperial Camp at Madrid,
December 16th, 1808.

Signed
NAPOLEON

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The Life of Baron Stein

CHAPTER I

A KNIGHT OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

VERY often in the course of the centuries, the German people has revealed an incapacity to clothe its aspirations and its feelings in a determinate form. That indistinct, irrational, diffuse, subconscious element which forms so large a part of the German soul seeks in vain for a mould in which to crystallize itself into clear, neat and precise definitions such as are habitual to the Latin spirit. The creative effort even of her poets and artists has always been hampered by this initial defect, but in no domain have its consequences been more deeply felt than in that of politics.

Politics — the 'art of making the possible real' in Bismarck's celebrated phrase, the 'art of making the impossible possible', in that of contemporary Nazism — must always be an activity devoted to concrete and terrestrial things, to the social and economic necessities of humanity.

Germany has long been regarded as the 'country of thinkers and poets', incapable of producing truly great statesmen or of imparting a finished form to its national existence. And indeed the clear idea of the State has taken considerably longer to develop in the Germans than in the other European peoples.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, at a time when France, England and even remote Russia were constituted as centralized monarchies, Germany was still far indeed from finding the definitive political structure of its national life.

The 'Holy Roman Empire of German Nation', according

to a famous aphorism was neither Holy, nor an Empire, nor German, and to call it 'of German Nation' was equally inexact. The claims of the emperors on the glorious heritage of Charlemagne — on Rome, on Italy — had long been extinguished for ever, in the fall of the Hohenstaufen, while on the other hand the number of Slavs and Magyars subject to the imperial dynasty of the Habsburgs had grown till it almost equalled its subjects of German race. As for holiness, this was something for which that frivolous and 'philosophic' century had no use. And as for imperial power, all that remained was, in the mordant phrase of the great Frederick, the 'shadow of a ghost'.

On the territory of the Empire, 300 independent sovereignties claimed to rule with equal authority, and alongside of these were some 4000 lordships and almost as many more abbeys and grand-masterships of Orders.

'Follow with your eye (if indeed you can disentangle them on the map) the strange configurations of these innumerable little states, interlocked with one another by the most varied accidents of conquest and succession,' exclaims the Duc de Broglie, the eminent historian of Frederick II. 'Engrave in your mind, by an effort of memory, all the titles of which these potentates and magistrates, great and small, were so proud. Kings, dukes, archdukes, counts palatine, bishops, margraves, burgraves, landgraves — the variety of titles represented every political form that a society could assume, from pure monarchy at Berlin and Vienna to ecclesiastical rule at Mainz and Cologne and republican liberty in the Imperial Free Cities.'

Decked at his coronation with all the splendours of medieval pomp, the emperor in ordinary life possessed very limited rights indeed. He bestowed titles of honour and benefices; his revenue consisted of some trifling chancery fees, a levy on Jews and some obsolete subsidies,

KNIGHT OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

the whole amounting to 14,000 florins annually. He had under his orders an Army of the Empire — 40,000 men on paper, 20,000 in fact — whose organization presents a truly grotesque picture, for not only regiments but even companies were formed of the contingents of several different states, each jealously preserving its own armament and its own uniforms. 'In the same company, the captain might be nominated by a count, the first lieutenant by a city, the second lieutenant by the head of a religious order or, if it came to that, by an abbeſs.'

The Imperial Supreme Court (Reichskammergericht) at Wetzlar, flanked by the Imperial Aulic Council at Vienna, was limited in its jurisdiction to cases of minor differences between the various princes and to certain appeal cases from the local courts.

The Diet of the Empire had fallen into complete discredit. The choice of the emperor by the 'College of Electors' had reduced itself more and more to a mere formality; the effort of France to substitute the representative of another dynasty for the Habsburgs achieved only one momentary success in the election of Charles VII of Bavaria. The 'College of Princes' had transformed itself gradually into a meeting of a few dozen diplomats who spent their time in discussions of unbelievable puerility; for instance the question of the colours of the chairs, red or green, to be allotted to this and that category of sovereign was argued for years. And, to complete the picture of this 'national assembly' of Germany, it may be added that it included the representatives of three foreign princes holding territory in Germany — the King of England in his capacity as Elector of Hanover, the King of Sweden as sovereign of part of Pomerania, and the King of Denmark in virtue of Holstein.¹

¹ Even Prussia proper was outside the Empire, and the 'King in Prussia' was represented in it in his capacity as Elector of Brandenburg. — TRANSLATOR

With all this, it was still possible to speak of a national unity, in spite of this disintegrated empire and these innumerable sovereigns who played each for his own hand, guided exclusively by cupidity and egoism and dreaming only of territorial aggrandisement at a neighbour's expense. Though a national structure, a system of institutions comprising the whole nation, was practically non-existent, those who were thereby led to deny the very existence of a 'German Nation' committed a grave psychological error. -

The error was not confined to foreigners — many a German thinker, conscious of the sorrows of his fatherland, shared it. 'Without law or justice, without security for our children, our freedom, our rights or our lives, the helpless prey of higher powers, lacking all sentiment of nationhood — such is our present condition!' cried the publicist Johannes Müller. 'I cannot understand how we Germans have lost the courage and the intelligence necessary to lift us above heavy pedantry and towards an effective imperial constitution, towards a common patriotism, so that we should be able to say at last: "We are a nation".'

'A nation', nevertheless, they were, however incompletely, indefinitely and sometimes unconsciously. The community of race and language formed, in spite of everything, an indestructible bond within this aggregate of millions of human beings.

The Imperial idea itself was still alive in the masses, whatever the appearances to the contrary. It was a dream rather than a political reality — the dream of an emperor 'whose heart was the source of right and justice', the dream of an empire of such a constitution that the contradictory principles of unity and particularism would be reconciled in it.

The poets and writers, too, in spite of their cosmopolitan tendencies, not seldom allowed themselves to find inspiration in this national sentiment. Was not Klopstock

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proclaiming a love of the German fatherland when he celebrated with such enthusiasm the struggle of the ancient Germans for their independence? And was not Herder heralding the historic mission of his country in calling the German the ideal man of the future? The German monarchs themselves, fiercely though they fought for their particular interests, were not always insensitive to patriotic considerations. 'How long shall the foreigner be permitted to tread the soil of our dear country Germany?' cried Maria Theresa in the War of the Austrian Succession. 'Is this not an opportunity to rid the fatherland of an age-long oppression? And those who would refuse to take it, have they a drop of the noble German blood in their veins?' And King Frederick himself—who twice called French armies into the Empire—did he not proudly call himself, in a letter to Charles VII, a 'good and faithful German patriot', and say to Joseph II in an interview, 'We Germans will always manage to come to an understanding'?

Side by side with hypocritical monarchs and poetic dreamers, with a wretched peasantry and a *petite bourgeoisie* that was servile, mean and politically impotent, there existed in the Germany of 1750 a class of men who, by reason of their particular station and family traditions, were the trustees and natural heirs of the national Imperial idea.

'Baron and Freiherr of the Holy Roman Empire of German nation!' Does not the phrase call up a picture of some blond burgrave in his armour of steel, riding out over the drawbridge of a castle to kneel, sword in hand, before the carved throne of an emperor famed in story?

By the middle of the eighteenth century such pictures belonged only to a distant past. The stout warriors of old had transformed themselves into peaceful landowners dressed in the French coat and lace ruffles, spending their time in

estate-management, hunting, and the second-rate distractions of the small German courts. But under a veneer of the *petit-maitre* they had managed to preserve not only the privileges but the outlook of the feudal baron. Infatuated with their independence, they recognized nothing but the direct sovereignty of the emperor, and allowed no intermediary between themselves and him. They regarded themselves as the equals of the kings and princes whose powerful states surrounded their modest territories.

In the best representatives of this imperial baronage, the particularism and the egoistic aims of the princes found their natural opponents. Even when (as happened very frequently indeed) limited resources compelled the Reichsfreiherr to take service at the court of this or that King or Elector, he remained always conscious of his origins and his rights. Consequently, they were proof against the common danger of the period; they ran scarcely any risk of falling into the servility that was the curse of all political life in Germany. Their status in fact symbolized, in the midst of this country, so divided and chopped-up, the imperishable existence of Germany one and indivisible.

A thousand or so families, grouped chiefly in the Rhine lands, belonged still, on the eve of the great Revolution, to this privileged class of Reichsfreiherrn, and it was in one of these families that, at Nassau, on October 26th, 1757, there was born Karl Heinrich vom Stein, the hero of this book, the man who, after the destruction of the Empire, handed on to coming generations the torch of the Imperial idea.

CHAPTER II

APPRENTICESHIP

THROUGH long centuries the powerful citadel of the Counts of Nassau cast its shadow over the modest feudal dwelling that sheltered Baron vom Stein's ancestors. Through a long succession of generations an obstinate feud persisted between the two families. Since the Thirty Years' War both manors had fallen into ruin. The Nassaus had left the picturesque and romantic banks of the Lahn to pursue their way to the glorious destiny that was to bring their descendants — thanks to an alliance with the House of Orange — to the thrones of Holland and England. The Steins, for their part, had moved down into the town of Nassau and built there a fine residence, half baronial and half patrician, which contained also the managerial offices of their lordship. But the disputes arising out of the collection of tithes and the demarcation of farms went on and on, and it was these that generated in the future great statesman of Germany his lifelong hatred of the German principalities. One is inevitably reminded of Richelieu and the tragic struggle of his family with the proud seigneurs of Maussion, which left its imprint on the whole political ideology of the great cardinal who unified France.

The origin of the noble family of the Steins lay in an immemorial past. The chronicles of the thirteenth century tell us that at the partition of the Nassau properties in 1255 a considerable amount of land passed to Henricus de Lapide (which one might render in French as De la Roche). The Steins of the Middle Ages were stout warriors — Karl vom Stein, the future 'Enemy of France', could count among his ancestors a Ritter Christian who fought against the French under the banner of the Dukes of Burgundy. At

the time of the Reformation, the sole representative of the ancient barony had embraced the priestly career, and the line was about to die out. But then came the preaching of Luther, and under its influence Hengelbrecht vom Stein, Canon of Trier, broke his vows and married, in 1525, Margaret Greifenclau von Vollraths. From this couple our Karl Heinrich descended in the direct line.

His parents were very undistinguished people, typical representatives of the petty nobility of Germany in the middle of the eighteenth century. Karl Philipp, the father, Privy Councillor at the Court of the Elector and Prince Bishop of Mainz, was chiefly remarkable for a violent and irascible temper, which his son inherited. His favourite occupation was hunting. He called himself a freethinker, and refused the sacraments on his deathbed. His wife, born Langwerth von Simmern, had previously been the wife of Ritter Löw zu Steinfurt; she bore Karl Philipp ten children, of whom seven survived.

The three brothers of our hero all became soldiers, and it was curious, though most characteristic of the times, that each entered the service of a different sovereign. Johann Friedrich, the eldest, became colonel in the army of Frederick the Great and eventually Master of the Horse at the brilliant court of his successor Frederick William II. The second, Friedrich Ludwig, Knight of the Teutonic Order, was an officer in Austria and distinguished himself by his heroic defence of the Veterani Cave against the Turks in 1788.

The youngest, Freiherr Ludwig Gottfried, German biographers have tried hard to ignore. They have confined themselves to mentioning that he was the bad boy of the family and ended his life without distinction. The fact is that Ludwig vom Stein — *horribile dictu* — entered the French army. Naturally, he could hardly foresee at that date that events would make the name of Stein synonymous with all that was anti-French. It seems that during the

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French occupation of Berlin the two brothers, representatives of opposite camps, found themselves one day face to face, but refused to speak to one another.

As to the three sisters, we have a lively description of them by Baron Hardenberg, the future collaborator of Stein and Chancellor of Prussia, who made their acquaintance during a visit to Nassau in 1772. 'They are handsome girls,' he writes, 'and Louise, the eldest, is the prettiest — she is a brunette, with a good figure and fine black eyes — sentimental young woman — Marianne, the second, might serve as a pendant to Aesop. Charlotte, the third, good figure, quite charming, slightly marked by the smallpox.' A few days later Hardenberg expresses himself in his journal in an infinitely more enthusiastic tone. 'It's all very fine to be philosophical, but how can you help admiring a lovable person, especially when she is so lovable as Louise vom Stein. I love her more than I can say.' But bold declarations between young people were not in fashion. Timidity prevented Hardenberg from avowing his passion to Louise, and eventually he married a Danish lady, Countess Reventlow, who led him a dog's life and became the mistress of George of England. Louise, for her part, contracted an unhappy marriage with one Baron Werthern, a pedantic, puffy and ridiculous personage. The great Goethe met her in 1781, and in his correspondence he could not praise her enough for the soundness of her judgment, her grace, her delicacy and her perfect knowledge of the world. Louise awakened in him poetic ecstasies: 'She is lost for this life. One would say she was some soul emerging from an undeserved Purgatory and rising to Heaven on the wings of a divine Love.' And — the supreme praise — it was on her that he modelled the fair Countess of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*.¹

¹ She is not to be confused, of course, with Charlotte von Stein, the poet's love from 1775 to 1786. — TRANSLATOR

Stein's two other sisters were not gifted with personalities so marked. Marianne became Canoness of the Abbey of Wallerstein, and in that capacity had trouble with the French in 1809, so much so that the Napoleonic authorities made her go to Paris — where however she succeeded in vindicating herself. Lastly, Marie Charlotte became the wife of Herr von Steinberg, Minister of State in Hanover, a marriage which helped to give her brother access to the influential circles of that Electorate.

The assiduous researches of German historians have discovered nothing interesting about the infancy and youth of our hero. He tells us himself that his first fifteen years were spent in a simple and half-rustic atmosphere among the fields and meadows surrounding the little town of Nassau. A very important factor was the influence of his mother, who awakened in him a profound and sincere feeling of Lutheran piety. And this woman seems to have possessed not only a highly developed religious spirit, but also a great fondness for literature and the arts. She had furnished her house in the Rococo style, *à la française*, and visitors to Nassau to-day may still admire the charming taste that ruled in the establishment. She was in touch with all the literary events of the time. We find in her letters the names of Herder, of Wieland. The young Goethe was welcomed in her house when he presented himself in company with the two 'prophets' Lavater and Basedow,¹ with whom he had just made a cheerful trip through the Rhineland. Throughout life Karl vom Stein retained for his mother feelings of respect and profound gratitude. In his leisure hours Karl amused himself with the boys of the town and the countryside, and his mother observed with joy that he was not infected with the 'epidemic of proud

¹ '29 June 1774. Arrived at Nassau at eleven. We went at once to visit the Baroness vom Stein. A magnificent house in a poor little town. A great lady of fifty, very original. She asked us to dinner' (*Goethe und Lavater*, Letters and Journals, edited by Heinrich Finck. Weimar, 1901).

insolence that rages amongst the heirs of our imperial baronies'. 'For them other people don't exist, just because they possess certain illusory privileges that are not worth the cost. No, my Karl is not of that sort!' the mother of the future social leveller added with a sigh of relief.

At the age of fifteen the young baron was entered at the University of Göttingen, a principal centre of law studies. Here, under the eye of strict tutors, he seems to have lived a retired and studious life. The first of his tutors, the Alsatian Salzmann, did not get on very well with his impetuous pupil. 'He is suspicious, curt, inclined to paradox. I am not convinced that his heart is good,' which tirade however did not prevent the tutor from adding, prophetically, 'he will certainly become a very great man'.

As a matter of fact the atmosphere of Göttingen was particularly favourable to the education of a future servant of the State. It was unique among German universities in that it was free from the despotism of princely caprice; the Elector of Hanover, who was sitting on the throne of England, was concerned with more serious matters. The professors of the Faculty of Law were men of great scientific worth, who devoted themselves with ardour to the study of ancient German institutions and set themselves up as defenders of corporative liberties. Stein carried throughout his life the impress of these ideas.

Literature and the arts, on the other hand, were neglected. There was, indeed, a circle of admirers of Klopstock's poetry, but young Stein did not know of it. Its distractions were few and dull; Stein himself, in a letter from Göttingen, speaks of 'these concerts without good music, these balls without dancers and these drawing-rooms without women. . . . The only remedy, if one does not want to die of boredom, is work.'

A pretty dreary ambience, doubtless, but at least it spared him the temptations of 'student life' to which so

many of his contemporaries in the livelier universities succumbed.

Though he assiduously pursued his studies for seven long terms, he took no degree, not because he had neglected to qualify, but because for a man of this noble extraction there was no point in decorating himself with the title of 'Doctor'. To enter the Councils of State in those days, a sufficient credential was the possession of four quarterings of nobility, and in this respect of course the young baron of the empire was more than equipped.

Stein's parents had great ambitions for their youngest son. They had not failed to discern in him the high moral and intellectual qualities that in due course should make him a great statesman, and when he was seventeen they chose him to 'carry on the line', and induced the three elder brothers to renounce in his favour all rights in the family properties. Having thus secured his material future, they next decided to put him into the administrative career that would lead him to the high dignities of the empire, instead of following a life of adventure in the armies like his brothers.

On the termination of his studies, therefore, Baron Karl was sent to begin his career at Wetzlar, the seat of the tribunal of the empire. Some years earlier, the young Goethe had also been attached to this court, and it is the people about it that are immortalized in *The Sorrows of Werther*. But Stein did not possess the artist's peculiar gift of transforming the most boresome prose into pure poetry. He met no Lotte at Wetzlar. 'One finds here some pretty girls: some of them even seem quite amiable, provided one treats them nicely' — he declares in one of his letters. 'The general tone of society here is pompous and bourgeois. One looks in vain for people of courtesy and consideration. The men stick in the corners of the salons and discuss points of jurisprudence, or devote themselves to cards. And the fact that the emperor has conferred titles

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of nobility on them has not altered the character of their petty and provincial wives.'

The only profit that Stein derived from his years at Wetzlar was that his knowledge was widened by the 'study of the documents of the most important cases', and that he formed some useful connections. It was during his stay in the Imperial City, more precisely in the winter of 1777-8, that he was initiated into that German Freemasonry which in the eighteenth century counted so many distinguished adepts, Frederick the Great and Goethe included. The local Lodge of which Stein became a member was called the 'Three Helmets'; in due course this Lodge conferred on him the grades of Fellow Craft and Master Mason, and it kept his name on its register till 1784.

From Wetzlar Stein proceeded to Vienna. In 1780 the capital of the empire was already a city of fine palaces and picturesque public gardens, but its tone was stiff and provincial. There was nothing as yet of that soft romantic gaiety that at the end of the Napolconic wars was to enchant the participants in the great Congress. A court hidebound in its Spanish etiquette, an aristocracy of old-fashioned ways, a population of placid small bourgeois — such at the close of the eighteenth century was the Vienna of which Madame de Staël was presently to give us so engaging a picture.

Here too the young man ran no risk of departing from the path of virtue which he seemed preordained to follow. Austere and proud, he moved untouched through the salons of the Austrian nobility, and his stay in Vienna left no deep imprint on his soul.

In February 1780, after a brief tour in Styria and Hungary, he arrived at Berlin to enter the service of Prussia.

CHAPTER III

IN THE SERVICE OF PRUSSIA

‘Look upon the standard of the House of Brandenburg as the crest of your liberty. Unite yourselves to its power, support it, help it in its just expansion, rejoice in its successes.’

Mirabeau to the Germans (*La Monarchie prussienne*)

THE learned biographers of Stein have not of course resisted the temptation to plunge into long historical arguments as to the reasons which led the young Reichsfreiherr to enter the service of Frederick the Great.

His motives in doing so were, however, extremely simple. To understand them, we need only go to the most gifted German of the period and re-read the passages that Goethe devoted in his memoirs to the famous Prussian King. Recalling his childhood's memories of the anti-Prussian atmosphere of Frankfurt, the Imperial City in which his parents lived, the poet declares, ‘My sympathies were Prussian, or rather Frederician, for after all who cared about Prussia? It was the personality of the great king that stirred all hearts; I rejoiced with my father at his victories, I dedicated odes to him and wrote childishly rhymed satires on his enemies.’ All Germany, probably, felt as did this son and grandson of Austrian councillors, and saw in the victor of Rossbach the great national hero. It was more than natural, then, that a man of the calibre of Stein should fix his choice on the sovereign who ‘made the universe tremble at the rattle of his arms’ — as the young man himself once described his future master.

At the beginning of 1779 his mother had already addressed a letter to the ‘sacred person’ of Frederick II, ‘the

greatest Monarch of the Universe, the man who has evoked the admiration of all Europe'. On the strength of her eldest son's rank as Colonel, she asked for the title of Chamberlain and Councillor of Embassy for her youngest. The king replied politely, but not without indicating his surprise. 'The Baroness,' he wrote maliciously, 'will no doubt comprehend that it is difficult for him to confer positions of honour on a young man that he does not know and has never even seen.' The snub was well deserved, but it did not influence Stein's purpose. He had meanwhile received alluring promises from a powerful friend of the family, the Minister of State von Heinitz, who guaranteed him the most cordial of welcomes at Berlin.

Heinitz was a man of outstanding qualities. At the head of the Mines Department, he had made great efforts to exploit the immense subterranean riches of Prussia. He had spent some time in Paris, and had there come under the influences of the Physiocrats. He was the author of an essay on political economy, written in French and published at Berlin, in which he advocated a realist policy based on 'an exact analysis of the constitution of the State that one is supposed to govern.'¹

It was probably with such theories, a little banal perhaps but fundamentally practical, that he greeted his young protégé. He gave him advice on the choice of his career and, without much difficulty, diverted him from diplomacy into his own field of activity, in which wide opportunities were opening up for an ambitious young man who was determined to work hard. Invested (after all) with the rank of Chamberlain — which incidentally was purely honorary — Karl vom Stein on February 4th, 1780, took the service oath as 'Referendar' in the General Directorate of Mines. The instructions issued to him were couched in the queer

¹ 'No one is more hardworking than he is; it would be difficult to have a more extended knowledge of mathematics, of commerce, of finance and of political economy' (Archives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prussia 9, No. 97).

French-German of the time; he was to 'protocoliren, rubriciren, extrairen, referiren' and to carry out 'local-recherchen'. The Prussian office-wallahs no doubt thought they had acquired a colleague of their own sort.

But it was not Stein's destiny to become an office-wallah. Twenty years earlier, a young Frenchman of high moral and intellectual capacities had likewise disdained the prospects of a brilliant career at the Court of Versailles and preferred to bury himself as an unpretending worker in a remote province. The immortal achievement of Turgot as Intendant of the Limousin was not unknown to the young Prussian official — Condorcet's *Life of Turgot* was at that time in everyone's hands — and it was to provide the Reichsfreiherr with his model. Turgot had built fine roads, developed local industries, mitigated the *corvée*, brought about a just distribution of the *taille* and instituted free trade in grain. Might not one do as much in Prussia?

So, after some months of study, our hero had himself sent to Westphalia, and there he buried himself for a quarter of a century. In Wetter, Minden, Cleve and other towns of the Prussian west, he moved up, in the course of the years, through all the grades of the Prussian bureaucracy. He was promoted successively Councillor, Director of Mines, Second and First President of the Domianial Chamber and, finally, General President of all Westphalia. We need not follow him through all his peregrinations; it will suffice to separate out the essential characters of his activity during this period.

In the débuts of great men there is often found something that presages and symbolizes their future. Is it not extremely curious to note, therefore, that the first official report signed by Stein related to an economic enterprise which at the time was of purely local significance, but in its consequences affects — and how it affects! — even our own day. The matter in question was the canalization of

the Ruhr, that little river which traverses the richest mining area in Europe. Stein took part in this work, which was intended to provide the subterranean wealth of Westphalia with an outlet to the Rhine and to Holland. With a prophet's eye, he was the first to foresee the possibilities of developing the neglected lands in the north of the County of Mark, where, later, inexhaustible beds have been discovered and hundreds of blast furnaces have arisen.¹

After the communications by water, those over land; Stein became the first builder of highroads in Westphalia. The ninety-six miles of road traced under his direction in this same County of Mark constituted a link between northern and southern Germany and opened up new possibilities in the supply of raw materials and the distribution of manufactured products. Faithfully following his exemplar Turgot, he accomplished this with free labour without having recourse to the *corvée*. When, on occasion, public funds failed, he found himself obliged to advance considerable sums (up to 10,000 thalers) from his own private means to avoid a suspension of work. In all this, however, he had to cope with a general indifference which at times became undisguised hostility. With the exception of Heinitz, the Prussian ministers were hostile to the creation of good roads in a region so close to French territory, and the great Frederick himself considered that main roads merely facilitated invasion. This strange prejudice was shared by the bourgeoisie, who were fearful of the devastating marches of armies, their ruinous requisitions and their unwelcome billetings. The artisans, even, thought themselves injured by Stein's works, for they had made considerable profits from repairing the vehicles that were for ever being damaged by the old crude tracks.

Stein's merit was not less conspicuous in the domain of industry. Before he arrived on the scene, the mineral

¹ Letter of Stein to Sack, dated Münster, November 25th, 1802.

wealth of Westphalia had been worked in an exceedingly primitive fashion, and technical improvements already in use in other districts—the Harz, the Erzgebirge—were utterly unknown here. Stein the administrator became an engineer. With the authorization of his government, he spent a whole year at the Mining Academy at Freiberg, visited the chief coal districts of central Germany and made a long professional tour in England. With this scientific equipment behind him, he set to work, with success, to introduce new methods into the Westphalian undertakings.

In the purely administrative sphere, this provincial novitiate was an excellent school for the future statesman. The territory under his authority had only recently come under the Prussian Crown. Many local customs survived in this province; it was one of the few regions in which the peasant could feel himself the equal of the noble and 'did not raise his hat if his greeting was not returned'. Collaborating with the free peasant community as well as with the diets of the provincial nobility, the young bureaucrat learned very many lessons—in fact, was not all his future reforming activity to be inspired by these two fundamental principles, emancipation of the peasant class and participation by the population in the management of its own local interests?

Already in the first years of work, Karl vom Stein's exceptional energy had attracted the king's attention. In 1782 Frederick II had raised his eyebrows at the somewhat rapid promotion of the young baron to the grade of Higher Councillor of Mines after only two years' service. But in 1785 he entrusted him with a very different and more important mission, namely to represent him at the Court of Mainz in negotiations of extreme delicacy in the field of high politics.

At this time Frederick was setting up as the defender of German liberty, and spending the last efforts of his genius

in opposing the ambitious schemes of the Emperor Joseph II. The latter wished to annex Bavaria, ceding to the Elector in compensation the rich area of the Netherlands. These proposals had alarmed all Germany, and Frederick profited by it to organize a league of princes (*Fürstenbund*) after the famous precedent of the Schmalkaldic League of the Religious Wars. In this movement of protest the celebrated publicist Johannes Müller thought he saw the first act of a patriotic renaissance in Germany. And destiny willed that Stein should be associated with it.

The task set him by the king was to obtain the Elector of Mainz's adhesion to the *Fürstenbund*. On this occasion he saw with his own eyes the decadence in which the little Rhine states were foundering, and the picture he has given is so deeply informing. The Cardinal Elector, Karl von Dalberg, an old man of sixty-seven, had fallen completely under the influence of his two nieces, of whom the younger, Madame de Ferret, inspired the tenderest sentiments in him, while the elder, endowed with a more masculine intelligence had, according to Stein, 'given up her love intrigues in order to amass wealth and political influence'. The same atmosphere reigned in the adjacent 'capitals'. Duke Karl of Zweibrücken was a German imitation of Louis XV, and spent fabulous sums on spectacles, hunting parties, balls and jewels to please his mistress, the wife of the Minister von Eisebeck. His confessor, Abbot Salabert, went one better, keeping a whole harem on the subsidies secretly paid to him by Prussia. But the record was held by the Landgrave of Hesse; with him no one had yet been able to carry on a continuous negotiation, for he would from time to time vanish mysteriously for months on end, like the hero of a Shakespearian comedy.

These traits — so very eighteenth-century — may make us smile. But how depressing, how humiliating a spectacle

for a young German knight of severe morals whose heart burned with patriotic fire! Stein came out of it with the iron in his soul, profoundly disgusted with the poisonous atmosphere of the little German courts and 'their spirit of caprice, their sham activity, their worldly pleasures, their meanness and their dreariness'.

He refused new offers that the king made him, though they would have given him access — this time under specially attractive conditions — to the diplomatic career that he had formerly coveted. Single-minded and vehement, incapable of compromising with conscience or dissimulating his feelings, he knew by now that he had not the qualities required in a diplomat of the old regime. He preferred to go back to his mines and roads and fields and forests in Westphalia.

Back in his district, he plunged into his usual preoccupations. The little leisure left to him he devoted to wide historical studies; and among the works that impressed him most profoundly was Herder's *Ideas Concerning the Philosophy of History*. Although he was obliged to see many people, his household routine was very simple; he kept a valet, a groom, and two maidservants — all over fifty years of age.

The present-day public is particularly fond of details concerning the *vie amoureuse* of the great men of the past. From this point of view, the biography of Freiherr vom Stein can only be disappointing, for it is difficult to imagine a man of severer principles or austerer morals. This child of the smiling, sunlit valleys of the Rhineland had in him the stuff of an Anglo-Saxon puritan of the strictest sort. He was one of those men, often found in the fog-laden regions of the northern seas, who are only really interested in business or politics or science, and regard women and love as of quite secondary importance.

The poet Ernst Moritz Arndt, who lived for a long time

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in Stein's entourage, remarks again and again upon the profound aversion that he had for shallow people and naughty stories. He was anything but indulgent towards men who were 'very successful with women', and he did not mince his words even in the case of that other great statesman the Chancellor Hardenberg, for all that he was his personal friend. 'What an example to set our noble Court!' Stein said to Arndt. 'How can he still keep a spark of force or vigour, will or character, the vain, hoary old sinner, spending most of his time in running after whores?' The same indignation with the Duke of Weimar, the sprightly patron of Goethe and Schiller, for permitting himself a risky pleasantry at the dinner table. 'Dirty stories fill me with horror,' cried the virtuous baron, to the general consternation. 'I think it's unseemly for a German prince to sink to that in the presence of his officers.' The last word on Stein's *vie passionnelle* was said by Gneisenau. 'What do you expect?' exclaimed one day that delightful and splendid soldier of the Napolconic wars. 'Stein is always ready to condemn a tender sentiment. Love does not interest him.'

It is curious therefore to note, that in spite of this extraordinary frigidity, Stein's personality had an incontestable attraction for a great many women. The princesses of the House of Prussia, the society ladies of St. Petersburg, Countess Sophie Brühl, Countess Lanskoronska, Princess Louise Radziwill — all at one time or another felt the mysterious charm of this volcanic, haughty, sarcastic and curt nature, and gave him their enthusiastic admiration. Stein met them with solid friendship, destitute of any amorous thoughts. There was a tender sentiment possibly, in one case, that of Frau von Berg, a woman remarkable in every way, a granddaughter of the famous Podewils, Frederick the Great's minister and collaborator. But she was married to another, and for Stein that was enough to

create an insurmountable barrier between them. He was content to make her his confidante, and to keep up with her, over a long period of years, an unbroken and candid correspondence. For Princess Marianne of Prussia, too, he felt a great admiration — ‘born to reign, expressing, in all its aspects, the purity, harmony and dignity of her soul’. But this again was a purely platonic admiration, which went out to her chiefly as the sister-in-law of his sovereign and as the inspiration of the Prussian patriotic movement.

Stein was, however, from the sexual viewpoint, a perfectly normal being with a sane and vigorous nature. When the time came, he did like other people and decided to marry. He took to wife Countess Wilhelmine von Wallmoden, daughter of a Hanoverian marshal and granddaughter *de la main gauche* of King George II of England. Practical considerations may have influenced his decision to ally himself with a family belonging to the highest aristocracy of Hanover. Nevertheless, he did at this moment live something like a romance — the proof of it is to be found in his letters to Frau von Berg. ‘After having spent two weeks with the Wallmodens, I have been able to appreciate the pure and kind character, the sane and accurate judgment of the young Countess Wilhelmine. After I had left them I felt an insupportable void; I saw before me the prospect of a life solitary, isolated, joyless. The desire to obtain from her hands the sole happiness in life as I see it — domestic happiness — became so violent in me that I took the decisive step. And now I have the hope of uniting myself to her who has been for a long time the object of my desires and hopes. I am certain that I shall not be disappointed: I have known the Countess for three years, and I am convinced that purity of character and rightness of judgment are the sources of all the domestic virtues.’ This touching outburst, incidentally, ended on a more prosaic note. ‘It will be very interesting for me to enter

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into relations with the world round the Countess; her father is a man with a rare knowledge of life.' Some months later Stein informs Frau von Berg that his suit has been accepted by young Wilhelmine's family. 'One would have to be quite destitute of intelligence and feeling to fail to appreciate the worth of this pure and loving girl.'

The marriage took place in June 1793. It was, as a matter of fact, a very successful union, based on a sort of reciprocal respect in the partners. The portraits that we have of the lady, it must be admitted, show us a physiognomy destitute of all charm — long pointed nose, receding forehead, thin tight lips — the very type of a rigid and chilling North German woman. As a young married man, Stein is found complaining of the 'wrong education given to women of the upper classes' whose whole system of ideas reduces itself to 'incoherent odds and ends of opinions, usages and judgments'. None the less, it is certain that from first to last he appreciated the 'dignity and nobility of soul' of his wife, as well as the devotion to him that, on many occasions, life challenged her to show.

Three daughters were born of the union — Stein, who was to have been the 'continuer of the line', left no male descendant. He seems to have made an admirable head of a family. There is a letter of his, dated 1796, in which he speaks of his first child with a tenderness surprising in so grave a man. 'When she wakes up,' he writes in execrable French, 'she opens two great blue eyes, which are separated by a nose of quite the right size, to examine the objects around her; in a word, she feeds, sleeps, and looks with astonishment and curiosity at the world of which she has just become a citizen.'

From now on, Stein might well believe himself settled for good in the happiness of a studious existence and a placid family life. He was torn out of it, like millions of others, by the tragic events of the French Revolution.

CHAPTER IV

GERMANY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

IN our day the notion of history has evolved considerably. We have abandoned the describing of battles to specialist study — if not indeed to childish curiosity — and the clearing up of the tangles and diplomatic intrigues of the past centuries to the leisure of old men. One subject, only, passionately engages the interest of our age — the evolution and conflict of ideas, and with it the great destinies of the men who personify them.

Stein symbolizes better than any other the answer of Germany to the appeal — at once generous and tyrannical — of the French Revolution. We cannot therefore understand his character and his work without bringing them into close relation with the great revolutionary current that turned Europe upside down in the last years of the eighteenth and the first of the nineteenth centuries.

The classic work of Albert Sorel, *L'Europe et la Révolution française* might seem to have exhausted the subject. But since it was published our knowledge has been completed, not so much by fresh researches as by facts lived, by the resultants of recent experiences. We have been enabled to see with our own eyes the repercussion of a great revolution — the setting-up of the Communist regime in Russia — on contemporary public opinion and on the social and political structure of the European States. On the one hand, we have been able to estimate the uselessness of what Clemenceau called the 'barbed-wire fence' as a defence against the infiltration of subversive ideas. On the other, we have seen the miraculous changes that have taken

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place in these ideas themselves under the influence of different political 'climates', different national aspirations and traditions. We have seen the birth of the Hitler and Mussolini movements, issuing indirectly from the Bolshevik movement and becoming its exact opposite.

This lived experience of ours will help us better to understand the analogous events that took place in Europe a hundred and forty years ago. To begin with, we shall be able to appreciate at its true worth Jacques Bainville's incisive comment on 1789: 'The naivest of illusions is the illusion that the European World held its breath at sight of the marvels that were happening in Paris . . . the taking of the Bastille did not divert Louis XVI from going a-hunting nor the Parisians from going to the theatre that evening. Still less did it stop events in the rest of the world from pursuing their course, or wipe the slate of Europe clean.'

Let us, then — if we would rightly estimate the 'field strength' of such a radiation of ideas in our own time — look at the real importance of the opinions of the 'representative personalities', and in particular the thinkers and writers of that period. How erroneous our conclusions would be if we based our estimate of the penetration of Communism solely on the writings of an André Gide or an André Malraux!

And yet this, precisely, is the mistake of so many distinguished historians who tell us of the enthusiasm aroused in Germany by the French Revolution, and quote in evidence of the fact the high-flown words of this and that writer or philosopher beyond the Rhine. The great Herder, we are told, hailed the Revolution as the most important event in the life of humanity since the Reformation. Improving on this, Johannes Müller, the historian of Swiss liberty, proclaimed (so it is affirmed) that the destruction of the Bastille was equivalent in importance to the birth of Christ. Kant and Fichte joined the chorus, and

Klopstock and Wieland lamented that their rich poetic vocabulary did not contain words eloquent enough to celebrate the birth of Liberty.

But on looking more closely, we perceive almost at once that this enthusiasm was no more than a flash and a flicker. Only a few superior minds reacted to the immediate contagion of the revolutionary ardour, and the coming of the Reign of Terror quickly threw these German protagonists of liberty into the opposite camp. Goethe, at first not less sensible than the rest to the generous appeal of the social reformers of France, wrote in 1793, 'I could not possibly be a friend of the French Revolution then, for I was too much struck by its horrors. Every day and every hour these revolted me, while I could not yet see the beneficial consequences.' And if this was the case with the *élite*, the representatives of the 'world of ideas' who were far more remote from realities and concrete political life than their sort was in France, what is to be said of the masses?

Sorel has admirably set forth the deep causes which led the great majority of the German nation to display towards the French Revolution an attitude of indifference and even hostility—the provincialism of public spirit, the respect for religious traditions, the heaviness of the German temperament, the inveterate habit of submission to authority. To this list we may add, with Rambaud, the fears of the petty princes, who 'in their vanity and pride imagined that they themselves were hit by the blows that struck the nobility of Versailles'. We may add, further, the indignation aroused among the little Rhine sovereigns by the secularization of ecclesiastical lands in Alsace, which directly affected their interests. In sum, we can well understand the truth of the apparent paradox that 'in proportion as Germany was influenced by French thought, she separated herself the more deeply from France'.

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In the domain of thought, two different conceptions of the Revolution necessarily put the two peoples in opposition from the outset. In France the liberation movement assumed an equalitarian character, tinged with Classicism, while in Germany it was necessarily a humanitarianism in the Romantic style, that kindled the enthusiasm of the enlightened spirits.

In the political domain, the contrast was even sharper. France, constituted for centuries past as a National State, aimed first at transforming its 'despotic' regime into an association of free citizens and next at imposing (for such was the idea of the Jacobins) universal happiness on the other peoples. For Germany, on the other hand, the first need was to find that form of national existence which so far it had lacked, and the breath of the revolutionary spirit could have no other effect but that of reanimating patriotic ardour and reviving the memory of a glorious past. The traditional diplomacy of the kings of France had always striven towards keeping Germany in a state of division. The Peace of Westphalia in 1648 had been the consecration of this policy, and from that date France had constituted herself the guardian of the so-called 'liberties' of Germany — a high-sounding formula which really amounted to defence of the particularist interests of greedy and dissolute princes and the gradual destruction of the unity of the empire. The chancelleries had come to speak of 'the Germanics' — a phrase representing the French conception pure and simple, and one that it is impossible to translate into German. In Jacques Bainville's words, 'The masterpiece of French policy in the seventeenth century was to be the fixation and organization of German anarchy.'

From the French point of view this policy was undeniably wise and in conformity with the interests of the monarchy. But in Germany, amongst the few men who could rise to

a true sense of their country's misery, it had always created bitter pain and anger, and the mistakes of the Convention only served to revive a fire of hatred that had been smouldering under the ashes of generations.

The French Revolutionaries, in reality, had extremely erroneous ideas as to the situation in Germany. With a blindness that seems to us incomprehensible, Danton, no less than Dumouriez and Brissot, called Prussia 'our future ally'. 'We cannot at all understand the interests of the Germanic body,' said Sieyès to the Prussian Gervinus, 'it is a chaos that presents no clear and exact idea.'¹

The inevitable clash between the two peoples, the two temperaments, the two philosophies, came when the Jacobins tried to impose their revolutionary ideal on Germany by force. The war of 1792 was the first episode of an epic struggle that was only to end more than twenty years later on the battlefields of Leipzig and Waterloo.

For their part, the Germans who took the field against the 'Sansculottes' deceived themselves as completely as did their opponents; they marched, under the command of the Duke of Brunswick, to disperse a 'band of malefactors' and to re-establish on his throne a king whom they believed, on the assertion of the *émigrés*, to be adored by his people.

This misunderstanding vanished on the hills of Valmy; one cannot too often re-read the lines devoted to this historic encounter in Goethe's field journal. 'In the morning, we still thought that we had only to pick up the French on the point of the pike and then roast them,' but by the evening eyes were opened, and nothing but curses were heard. Leaning over the bivouac fire the great poet pronounced, to the silent circle of baffled generals, the famous words, 'To-day and here, a new epoch in the history of the world has begun.' Then came the retreat, the break-up, the spectacular advance of the French to the

¹ Quoted by J. Bainville, *Histoire de deux peuples*.

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banks of the Rhine, the installation of the Republic of Mainz, the appearance on the other bank of those bands of fugitives, which the same Goethe pictures so touchingly in *Hermann and Dorothea*.

The waves of the republican tide broke upon the regions entrusted to the care of Stein, and the modest provincial functionary found himself face to face with the unleashed tempest.

Like every young nobleman of the eighteenth century, Stein had been subjected to the impress of French civilization. He had learned French as a child, and he used it all his life in his correspondence with his mother, his wife and the rest of his family. But the deplorable clumsiness of this style suffices by itself to show how refractory he was, and remained, to the elegances of the French spirit. Indeed he admitted to himself: 'I prefer to employ the German tongue,' he wrote once to Frau von Berg, 'it is impossible in a foreign language to avoid using inappropriate expressions. When I think of serious matters, my habit is to think in German.'

The masterpieces of French literature were not unknown to him. Among the seven thousand volumes in his library at Nassau, innumerable French works bear marginalia written in his own hand. But he read them principally in order to be instructed, to obtain practical notions on the history and economic life of peoples; he admired Turgot, as we have seen, and he esteemed Montesquieu. On the other hand the untidy theories of a Rousseau angered him, as is shown by many a remark in his youthful letters; while as for Voltaire, a holy horror was the only sentiment that could be felt by the young puritan and pietist German, to whom the paradoxical and ironic spirit of the philosopher of Ferney was absolutely inaccessible.

Not that there was anything of the reactionary in Stein. In his tour of Poland he laments the pitiable condition of

the enslaved peasantry, and in Mecklenburg he is shocked by the brutishness and ignorance of the lords, 'who create a desert around them like wild beasts'. And he does justice, as his correspondence equally shows, to the 'virtue and enlightened spirit' of Monnier and Bailly, Condorcet and Roland.

But towards the Revolution this typical child of Germany assumed from the very first a definitely hostile attitude. He watched the experience of the neighbour country frigidly, only concerned to draw salutary lessons from it. The sympathies of the aristocrat and traditionalist were with the *émigrés*. 'The Regent,' he wrote, after being presented to the Comte de Provence, 'is a kindly and reasonable man, with a clear judgment mellowed by experience. The Comte d'Artois has more vivacity, more fire, more French frivolousness, but he too is an intelligent and clever man, capable of decision. Their bearing is calm, and they express themselves on the questions of the day with prudence; sometimes they complain that they are neglected, and that the great work of re-establishing the social order is not being pursued with the coolness and consistency that it demands.'¹

Even when writing his memoirs as an old man, Stein speaks with emotion of the rising of the Vendéans, 'those pious peasants, filled with religious enthusiasm and devoted to the Throne, who, under intelligent and heroic leaders, gloriously resisted the blind fury of their bloodthirsty adversaries'.

From the first, however, he saw the Revolution opening up new horizons for his own country. 'You ask me, dear lady,² what will happen to Germany out of all this tumult, all this thrust of men, thoughts and opinions. French immorality and anarchy will never touch the sober and balanced judgment and the austerity of the German

¹ Letter to Frau von Berg, October 3rd, 1793.

² To Frau von Berg, March 5th, 1793.

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character. Perhaps we shall make no conquests in our struggle with this unhappy nation, but in any case we shall not succumb. The example of the excesses committed by our neighbours, the sight of the misery that grips two splendid estates of the French nation' (he refers to the nobility and the clergy), 'will serve to destroy many prejudices amongst ourselves and favour the growth of better feelings. I expect a war of some years' duration, but in the long run these events will have a salutary effect on us; they will re-establish our energy and courage and increase our antipathy towards this horrible nation of the French.' Do not these few phrases contain — even explicitly — the whole programme of the future War of Liberation?

From the moment that the French armies reached the Rhine, Stein felt the danger acutely and urged a determined resistance.¹⁰ He and his brother wrote to their mutual friend Jacobi, Prussian Minister in London: 'The disposition of the people of this country to innovate, to change the old order of things, to adopt a system which openly proposes the abolition of property, will be strengthened by a long stay of the French, and will establish in Germany a focus of anarchy and destructiveness.'

At the decisive moment when the troops of Custine, having taken Mainz and Frankfurt, threatened to invade the central provinces of Germany, Baron vom Stein — the functionary, the civilian — suddenly stood up to organize a resistance that no one had delegated to him. Seconded by his elder brother the Prussian colonel and his father-in-law Wallmoden, he worked out a detailed plan of action. He succeeded in overcoming the shyness of the Landgrave of Hesse — the famous vanishing prince of whom we have spoken — re-establishing connection between his regiments and those of the King of Prussia and getting reinforcements sent to him. In short, it was thanks to Stein's bold initiative that the Germans succeeded in stabilizing the situation.

He had the satisfaction of seeing with his own eyes the exit of Custine's heroic troops from Mainz after the capitulation. 'The expression of insolence, pride, and immorality that one could read on the faces of the French garrison, was simply intolerable; there was not a face among them that could attract one's sympathy.' Even at this period, as we see, Stein did not mince his words in expressing his hatred of the French. With a frankness bordering on ferocity, he even discovered 'in the faces of the female sex in Mainz the impress of a horrible degradation' left there by the good soldiers of France. (Might not one believe oneself in 1929, after the evacuation of the left bank by the Army of Occupation? History repeats itself. . . .)

In 1795 Stein was entrusted with a new task. 'The King has just charged me with the work of buying for the supply of the armies in Westphalia, which makes my position very burdensome and very responsible,' he wrote to Wallmoden in February of that year. In the accomplishment of this task he displayed all his high qualities as a sagacious and methodical organizer. He did not belong to the class of those who make fortunes out of army supply — in that respect suspicion never even touched him. Nevertheless the military authorities — those Prussian generals of matchless arrogance — found means to make trouble for him. They took him to task because he distributed supplies that were left unused by the troops to the needy and famished population of his district. He had authority for this from the King's Cabinet, and yet this same Cabinet, on the complaint of the generals, administered to Stein a reprimand in the best Prussian style, accusing him of having abused the generosity of his sovereign — his first experience of the ingratitude of the Prussian Crown.

The president took this personal blow with calm and dignity, but his indignation knew no bounds when he learned that Prussia was going out of the war and detaching

herself from the anti-French coalition. 'The stupid inertia, the foolish and dishonest policy of the Prussian generals,' he said, 'marked them for execration and contempt to all time.' When the King of Prussia signed the Treaty of Basle in 1795 Stein wrote to Wallmoden: 'This unhappy peace, which contains the principle of all the ills that await us, rouses in the empire an only too well-founded bitterness against the Prussian Court for its perfidious desertion of Germany.'

The Berlin government, however, had its own serious reasons for reconciliation with the Republic. It was then aiming at the definitive acquisition of its share of Poland, and the country could not possibly have continued the struggle on two fronts. Between the war for principle and the war for profit the choice had not been difficult. 'The King of Prussia,' says Albert Sorel, 'tackled the Republic stumbling and backing, always with an eye on Warsaw.' On the other hand Hardenberg, plenipotentiary of the King, hoped that peace with France would deprive Austria of the supremacy in Germany and so facilitate the establishment of a Prussian hegemony in the northern part of the empire.

But such subtle considerations were powerless to affect Stein's convictions. His honest and proud soul suffered in patriotic anguish. As early as 1795 he suspected that it would prove impossible in the long run, even at the price of compoundings and complaisances, to avoid a fresh struggle between the old Prussian monarchy and the young Republic, and in that case, would not the defection of Prussia weaken her moral position and deprive her of all sympathy and support in the future? Was she not likely to find herself, at the decisive moment, facing France alone? And further, would not the defection of Prussia, robbing the dying empire of its most powerful army, make its position hopeless?

Events were to justify him to the full. Prussia was enabled, indeed, for many years to enjoy her neutrality in an ill-gotten peace — but the course of world history was not to be arrested, nor the elemental forces of the French Revolution thus dammed back.

A second coalition was built up on the ruins of the now dislocated alliance. The first victories of the young Archduke Charles awakened momentary hopes in the patriots beyond the Rhine; Stein saw the moment approaching when 'Germany would be cleared of the horde of bandits that bore the name of the French army'. But Napoleon at Marengo and Moreau at Hohenlinden destroyed these illusions, and in the Treaty of Lunéville (February 9th, 1801) the left bank of the Rhine was definitely lost to Germany. To compensate Prussia and other German States, the Imperial Diet in 1803 decreed the dispossession of the ecclesiastical principalities and the political extinction of most of the Free Cities, their territory being partitioned.

Was this, as certain eminent historians have claimed, 'a real revolution', reproducing the principles of the French Revolution?¹ The parallel seems a very artificial one; it was not the revolutionary spirit but the greed of the German princes that ruled in these innovations. The mediatised nobility kept all its privileges, and the unity of the German nation was more weakened than strengthened. The hundreds of semi-independent little sovereignties had neutralized one another in the inseparable amalgam of the old empire, but henceforth their place was to be taken by a limited number of principalities of medium importance sufficiently strong to uphold their individual interests and to ignore the Imperial power altogether. If it was not a French Revolution, it was at any rate a terrible and

¹ 'At Regensburg as at Paris, the sovereign, nobility and the independent municipalities were extinguished. At Regensburg as at Paris, the ecclesiastical properties were secularized. At Regensburg as at Paris, more unity and centralization were achieved.' — Alfred Rambaud.

irreparable blow to the age-old structure of the Holy Roman Empire. Nothing henceforth would prevent its final dislocation; three years later, in 1806, Francis II formally relinquished the title of Emperor of Germany and absolved all the members of the empire from their constitutional obligations.

With this, the German patriots were confronted by an entirely new situation. Since the ancient empire had ceased to exist, it was no longer a question of revitalizing a decomposing organism, but of resuscitating the idea of national unity in a form better adapted to the time. It was Stein's merit in the eyes of history that he was one of the first to conceive and to proclaim the fundamental principles of this new ideology. ✕

While Napoleon set himself to fortify the medium principalities, to elevate Bavaria, Württemberg and Saxony into kingdoms and to reduce the power of Austria and Prussia, the German patriots, with Stein at their head, boldly adopted the opposite policy. If not Austria, then Prussia was destined in their view to become the instrument of German unification.

For this reason Stein did not hesitate to give his adhesion to the reforms of 1803, in so far as they tended to the aggrandisement of Prussia. He accepted with enthusiasm the task that the Berlin government proposed at that time to entrust to him, namely the administrative incorporation in the Prussian kingdom of the ecclesiastical territories falling to it under the 'Recesz'. In company with General Blücher, the future victor of Waterloo, he established himself in the castle of the Bishops of Münster, now roughly dispossessed, and transferred to it the seat of the Domianial Chambers of Westphalia, of which at this time he became President. In fairness, it must be allowed that he displayed much dignity and tact on this occasion. He succeeded in maintaining the admirable educational institutions

created by the clergy, and did his best, though with less success, to induce Berlin to approve the continuance of the ancient constitution of the regional estates. 'The German, the Westphalian in particular, possesses all the qualities necessary to the working of such a constitution — calm, love of order, attachment to forms and traditions,' he wrote. 'The Frenchman with his levity needs the whip of Louis XI, Richelieu and Louis XIV, and finds in his vanity a compensation for all the evils of a bad administration; formerly it was the honour of being the subject of the greatest of kings, now it is the mirage of equality.'

An incident caused at this time by the Duke of Nassau-Usingen, afforded Stein the opportunity of giving conspicuous expression to his sentiments, as a servant of Prussia's greatness, concerning the selfish aspirations of the German princelings. The Duke thought that the moment had come to settle for good the old, old dispute between his house and that of the Baron vom Stein. He considered that after the spoliation of the ecclesiastics the maintenance of a free barony of the empire had become an anachronism. And, indeed, the end of baronial privileges was near at hand — it actually happened in 1806. But the Duke was impatient, and, without waiting for the decisions of the Diet of the Empire, he, on January 3rd, 1804, sent a detachment of soldiers and officials to occupy two villages, hereditary fiefs of the Steins, announcing that thenceforward all signorial dues were to be paid to him.

This arbitrary act only remotely affected Stein's material interests. The sums in question were trifling, and the rents paid by the farmers were not affected. Moreover, as a landed proprietor, he was much more interested in the large estate which he had recently acquired in Silesia — having sold his land beyond the Rhine, which was now subject to France. It was exclusively on the point of principle that he protested to the Duke on January 13th,

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1804, in a letter which created a sensation throughout Germany. In it Stein, for the first time, made open profession of his political opinions.

He addressed the Rhenish potentate in a lofty tone that would scarcely be admissible even between equals. He wasted no time in lamenting the loss of his hereditary rights ('What sacrifice would he not willingly have accepted in the name of a great and noble idea?'), but at once took higher ground. The German princes, he declared, have proved that patriotic feelings are wanting in them. 'With the exception of the Duke of Brunswick, they dodged the conflict with the foreigner in which so much noble German blood was being spent. They preferred to ensure the precarious possession of their properties by bargaining with or buying off the French generals. What would it profit the independence of Germany for its strength to be still more concentrated in their hands?

'The independence of Germany will gain nothing by the absorption of the baronial lands in the principalities about them. To attain the great objects on which depends the prosperity of our nation, these petty principalities themselves must be united to the two great monarchies with whose existence the perpetuity of the German name is bound up.'

Thus was proclaimed for the first time, in a few famous phrases, the great programme of German unification under the aegis of Prussia and Austria — the programme of Stein, of Bismarck and of Hitler. . . .

Some months later Baron vom Stein was called to the General Directorate of the Prussian Kingdom, with the rank of Minister. In accepting this post, he again affirmed, in a letter to the King's Secretary, that 'the future of the German culture is indissolubly bound up with the prosperity of the Prussian Monarchy.'

Had he, in reality, backed the right horse?

CHAPTER V

THE HEIRS OF FREDERICK THE GREAT

GREAT forests of pines and firs: broad sandy plains of low fertility, fit only for the cultivation of potatoes and barley: mighty rivers that roll their waters towards misty lakes — such is the framework that Nature has given the Prussian State. Even in the industrialized Germany of to-day the tourist meets this landscape, a landscape destitute alike of the gentle charm of the French countryside and of the melancholy that emanates from the vast expanses of Russia. A climate that is neither too vigorous nor too relaxing, well fitted to produce a race of sane and healthy men, rude in their needs and tough at their work.

The German race took centuries to colonize this country, which was originally inhabited by Slavs, but in the end it has put its stamp on it for good and all. A few vestiges only of the old autochthonous population remain in the picturesque country by the Havel, where the astonished traveller finds, a few miles from Berlin, whole villages that have preserved the Wendish tongue and the costumes of a vanished age.

The Prussian State issued from the union of the Mark of Brandenburg, a Hohenzollern fief, and of East Prussia, an apanage of the Teutonic Order. A series of energetic princes — the Great Elector, the soldier-king Frederick William I and his illustrious son Frederick II — had succeeded gradually in transforming this remote province of the German Empire into a powerful state, rivalling the more ancient European monarchies.

But in spite of the victories of the great Frederick, the

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Prussian power at the end of the eighteenth century did not as yet rest on secure foundations. Prussia was not even a State in the true sense of the word; it was an aggregate of diverse provinces without territorial connection, separated by Hanoverian, Polish and other enclaves, a sort of confederation of territories with nothing in common, at first, but the monarch's person and court.

Later, a common army and a common administration were added, as also some rudiments of a unified legislation. But a wide field was still left open to provincial particularism. Thus the weights and measures, and the scales of direct and indirect taxation, and even the rights of the Catholics, varied from province to province. There was no common designation, even, for all the territories under the Hohenzollern rule, which were described officially by the circumlocution 'All the provinces and lands of his Royal Majesty'. The title 'King of Prussia'¹ rested only on the sovereignty of the two provinces of East and West Prussia. In an official document dated as late as 1807, Hardenberg as Chancellor said that it was 'desirable that the whole State should thenceforward be called Prussia'.

But there were infinitely graver causes than this for Prussia's weakness. On the threshold of the nineteenth century this State still maintained in all integrity a social structure that was based on the principle of castes and applied with absolute strictness. No other European country knew anything like it.

The barriers between the three classes or 'estates' of society — nobles, burghers and peasants — were insurmountable. The nobles were called 'lords' and the peasants 'subjects', and these denominations were in strict accord with the facts. The lords possessed not only the rights of property or joint-property in the peasant lands, but also those of local police and justice. The peasant found him-

¹ Strictly, 'King *in* Prussia.' See footnote, p. 21. — TRANSLATOR

self, in relation to them, in a state of dependence which is described in German by various terms: servage, hereditary subjection, etc. He was a serf in the proper sense of the word, attached to the soil, and his children were bound to domestic service. It was laid down in the law that he owed his lord 'fidelity, respect and obedience', and he might be compelled to swear an oath of loyalty and submission to him. He required the lord's permission to marry, and his permission might be refused if the girl were reputed to be 'light, lazy or obstinate'. The lord had the right to inflict corporal punishment or imprisonment, approved the choice of his heir, and obliged him to buy his beer and spirits from himself.

'The extension of agrarian servage in Prussia,' writes Cavaignac,¹ 'was in a sense the compensation left to the landed aristocracy in exchange for the political power of which it had been stripped in the past,' and, we would add, even more a recompense for the services it was expected to render to the State. Between such a nobility and a court nobility like that, say, of Versailles, there was only a very distant resemblance. The chief function of this caste was to serve in the army in war and help the king in the management of his patrimony in peace. The Prussian code was explicit as to this: 'On the nobility falls the duty of defending the State and maintaining its external dignity and its internal constitution.'

Officers' commissions were almost entirely reserved to the nobility. In 1806, out of seven or eight thousand Prussian officers only 695 were of lower origin. The whole of the local administrative power was equally in their hands; in their district meetings they chose the candidates for the post of Landrat, and below the Landrat the State had no direct agent of its power — as a judicial dictum stated, 'the Prussian State ended at the Landrat'.

¹ Godefroy Cavaignac, *La Formation de la Prusse contemporaine*, Paris, 1891.

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Exempt from ordinary jurisdiction, almost entirely freed from taxation, this privileged class was nevertheless subject to the rigours that are the invariable concomitant of the caste principle. Men of noble birth were not permitted legitimate marriage with women of the peasant or small bourgeois class. In these cases only morganatic, 'left-handed' marriages were allowed, and even then it was necessary to obtain the consent of three members of the man's family, a dispensation of the Supreme College of Justice and, in some cases, the approval of the king himself. Frederick the Great even objected to the marriage of his officers with the daughters of wealthy merchants. At times, indeed, he went further still, and would have imposed celibacy. 'I do not like lieutenants to marry,' he wrote once in his own hand. In his view no tie, no sentiment ought to be allowed to intervene between the noble and his primary duty of serving the State.

The population of the towns, the bourgeoisie, formed in Prussia a world apart from the rest of the nation. It had one and only one function, craft production, and that only within the urban boundary. 'On the countryside,' says Philip Philippson¹ in describing the situation of the small rural industries at the end of the eighteenth century, 'only carpenters, wagon builders, thatchers and weavers were allowed'; even their number was limited, and they might only live on the plots specially set aside for the holders of these small offices. If the peasant, or for that matter the lord, wished to replace a pane of glass, buy a table or a cupboard, repair his wall, buy a cask or a kitchen bowl, mend a pair of his shoes, eat a joint of beef that had not been slaughtered in his own yard, he had to go to the town, which was often several leagues away. Within the town itself trade was handicapped by a regime of guilds and corporations bequeathed by the Middle Ages; no occupation

¹ *Geschichte des deutschen Staatswesens.*

could be followed outside the limits of these corporations, whose members alone could, as 'masters', employ 'mates' and 'apprentices'.

The urban centres, moreover, were poor and few in number. In 1802 the Prussian State only contained eighteen towns of more than 10,000 inhabitants. Berlin was only a third-rate capital, infinitely less attractive and rich in monuments than its rivals Dresden and Munich. 'Berlin is a great city,' Madame de Staël wrote later, 'with very broad, perfectly aligned streets and fine houses. The ensemble is regular, but as it is not long since it was rebuilt, one sees nothing that recalls olden times. The capital of Prussia resembles Prussia itself; the buildings and the institutions are as old as the men and no older, because one man in fact is their sole author.'

Whereas in other parts of Germany the numerous and influential Imperial Cities had kept intact the right of communal elective representation, these ancient medieval privileges had long since been abolished in the sphere of authority of the Hohenzollerns. In Prussia the urban 'magistracy' had become a fiction, its members being nominated for life by the Government — generally as a reward for service in the lower grades of the army. A case is quoted of a burgomaster of Spandau, 'who had served in the ranks throughout the Seven Years' War', and one of Teltow, who was a retired sergeant of thirty-one years' service.

This 'magistracy' was, further, subject to the tutelage of the king's administration, which extended its control over the humblest little towns. Thus the king had to decide upon every increase of a municipal official's salary, were it but a matter of a few thalers, on the purchase of a new jet for the firemen, on repairs to the streets and even to the town clock, or the possibility of combining the functions of undertaker and night-watchman!

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Besides this royal tutelage, which at least was distant, there was another closer at hand, that of the garrison. Where there were not sufficient barracks (and the Government was not remarkably eager to build them) it was for the burghers to house the soldiers. They likewise fed them — at ridiculously low rates fixed by the military authorities themselves, and yielding practically no profit.

The whole of this system, this social structure of Prussia, must appear incomprehensible and even absurd, until it is seen and judged from the purely military point of view. On the other hand, as soon as it is envisaged thus, everything explains itself, everything hangs together. The needs of the army, its supply of leaders and men, food, clothing and munitions, overrode every other preoccupation of the community. Mirabeau well said that 'war is the national *industry* of Prussia', and in these conditions it is not surprising that the Hohenzollerns, with their indomitable energy, were in fact successful in creating in this poor country, and with its mediocre resources, a weapon of extreme power, a 'veritable armed camp in the heart of Europe'.

The disproportion between the army and the population of the country was flagrant. In 1740, at the death of Frederick William I, Prussia with its 2,240,000 inhabitants maintained 80,000 soldiers, a number equal to that of Austria with her sixfold population; and even the French army was only one and a half times as strong, although Louis XV had nine times as many subjects. At the death of Frederick II, when the population of Prussia had risen to 6,000,000, the peace strength of the army was 200,000 men, rising to 250,000 at the close of the century.

In short, it was a very heavy strain indeed that the ambitious policy of Frederick II had imposed on the country. But the genius of these two great kings had triumphed over the difficulties. Their 'enlightened despotism', their sense

of duty, their rigid economy, and the legendary simplicity of their Spartan lives had stimulated the entire nation, and, taking them all in all, these imperfect institutions had worked beyond reproach.

These two kings had governed their country after the fashion of a large hereditary estate, going personally into all the details and contenting themselves with the assistance of a few devoted secretaries. Frederick II himself — contrary to what one might have thought — had not the qualities of a great administrator in the modern sense of the word. 'Great as was the genius that Frederick II displayed in dealing with a hostile general or ambassador,' says Sybel, the ultra-conservative historian,¹ 'he showed very little creative force in the field of administrative organization.'

'Everything will work, and almost of itself, so long as the external policy is calm and uniform,' wrote Mirabeau after the great king's death, 'but at the first cannon-shot, or the first occurrence threatening storm, all this petty scaffolding of mediocrity will collapse. How all these subaltern ministers drag each other down! What a need for a pilot for it all, from the frightened crew to the bewildered captain! Who will be this pilot?'

Who is to receive the heritage of the great Frederick?

The man to whom the heritage fell of right was the son of that Prince August Wilhelm whom his great brother sent home from the front with the celebrated remark, 'Since you don't know how to make war, go and make children.' August Wilhelm had succeeded at any rate in this second task. Frederick William II, the new King, was a man of presence. 'His stature,' wrote Metternich later, 'was gigantic, and he was corpulent in proportion. In all gatherings he stood head and shoulders above the crowd

¹ *Ueber die Entwicklung der absoluten Monarchie in Preussen.*

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around him.' 'A big handsome man,' said Mirabeau, 'full-blooded, very robust, fond of violent exercise and gross pleasures.' 'The King,' wrote Stein in his memoirs, 'combined a lively sense of his dignity with an excellent memory that was enriched by the study of history, a quick comprehension, and a noble and kindly character. But the brilliance of these qualities was overshadowed by his sensuality.' Unfortunately, this sensuality, this lust for gross pleasures, was soon to become his predominant characteristic. Combined in some strange fashion with all this there was a trait of vague mystical aspiration — quite in the spirit of the period, for in contemplating the outline and the character of Frederick William II, is not one instinctively reminded of his famous contemporary Cardinal de Rohan, the hero of the 'Affair of the Necklace'?

Frederick II had been indifferent to female charms, interested only in the grenadiers of Potsdam. His nephew remained faithful to that garrison, but his preference was for the trumpeter's daughter. Wilhelmine Encke, later Madame vom Rietz and Countess von Lichtenau, promoted to the rank of royal favourite, became in Frederick William II's reign a sort of Prussian Pompadour, exercising influence over the court, the government and the whole policy of the country. But that was not all. Frederick William was so marriage-mad that, as Catherine the Great remarked, he could 'never have legitimate wives enough'. He did not send them to the scaffold like Henry VIII, but kept them all so far as it was practicable to do so. 'In 1790 the King of Prussia, left a widower by Countess von Voss, had three wives living — the Brunswick princess whom he had repudiated, the Darmstadt princess who, although divorced, retained her royal rank, and Fräulein von Dönhoff, his morganatic spouse' (Sorel).

The affairs of government had been entrusted by the

king to two favourites, Bischofswerder and Wöllner, intriguers and charlatans, adepts of the Rosicrucian Order, of which the king himself was also a member. Formerly, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this secret society had included eminent thinkers whose lives were given to the mystical search for truth, but at the time of Frederick William II it had degenerated into a set of visionaries who practised a boudoir occultism that enabled them to combine depravity of morals with a vague religiousness. 'Mistresses and favourites, Rosicrucians and lackeys, theosophists and light ladies lived in complete harmony and got on famously together.' To the end of his days the king remained under their complete domination.

His son and successor Frederick William III was a man of quite another stamp. Brought up carefully in a sort of bourgeois simplicity, he resolutely broke with the scandalous ways of the preceding reign. The Gräfin Lichtenau was expelled from the court, and Wöllner and Bischofswerder sent about their business. But the country did not gain much from the change; Frederick William III was assuredly the most mediocre and insignificant of all the Hohenzollern line. 'His was a second-rate nature, timid, inarticulate, prosaic and without elevation; slow-witted, unsure in his political judgments, penetrated with a sense, but a mean and pedantic sense, of duty, and yet profoundly imbued with his royal dignity.'¹ 'It was thought on his accession that he would be a warrior, but he is merely a soldier,' remarked a perspicacious observer.²

General Boyen, later an intimate collaborator of the king, characterized him thus: '... a certain bonhomie, a natural kindness, were at the bottom of the King's nature. When undisturbed, he was capable of making shrewd judgments, but contented himself usually with discovering

¹ Gerhard Ritter, *Stein, eine politische Biographie*.

² *Notice sur quelques personnes en Prusse en 1800*. (Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prussia 9, No. 97.)



Queen Louise



King Friedrich Wilhelm III
of Prussia



Grand Duke Constantine
of Russia



The Emperor Alexander
of Russia

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the weak points of a character or a piece of business. In this he was particularly clever, which unfortunately made him suspicious of people. On the other hand, when a serious decision had to be taken . . . his mind became confused, and he set himself with all his might to put off the solution of the problem. In these moments of crisis he seemed to forget his own previous orders. He was too proud, too mistrustful, to accord his confidence to any man and lean on him. He claimed indivisible power as exercised by Frederick the Only, and yet he never gave coherent orders, either to the military or to the civil authorities, except if it were to arrange military exercises within the barrack precincts. He contented himself with expressing this or that wish, and then let things go their way. When the ministers, forced by necessity, begged for a decision or submitted a scheme, he generally confined himself to criticizing a detail without rejecting the whole, or, again, he would start to make modifications that nullified the very object of the projected measure. The narrow circle of the royal entourage comprised a few courtiers and aides-de-camp who naturally agreed with the criticisms that the king made of his collaborators; these people had no interest in contradicting him, and many of them possessed even less practical knowledge than Frederick William himself. The king was perfectly content with this milieu which always agreed with him and was for ever assuring him of its devotion.'

It may fairly be said that the king made a point of surrounding himself with nullities; 'their mediocrity consoled him for his own'. 'His inseparable companion, his friend and confidant,' was General von Köckritz, whom Stein characterizes thus: 'He had passed his whole life in the petty atmosphere of the Potsdam garrison, where suppression of personality, servility and absolute obedience as the monks understand it were inculcated into him

with extreme rigour.' 'How could such an automaton have possessed the sentiment of honour and national patriotism?' he exclaims. 'How could he have comprehended that in the crisis of our time one can only preserve these values at the price of a great effort, a determined struggle?'

Frederick William III, 'void' (in Stein's words also) 'of all elevation and all greatness', was assuredly a king of the sort that brings down dynasties. His combination of indecision and blind obstinacy makes us think for a moment of Louis XVI and Nicholas II, though he lacked the kingliness of a Bourbon and the personal charm of the last Romanov.

What saved Frederick William after all was, on the one hand, the influence of the charming Queen Louise — of whom we shall have much to say anon — and, on the other, the passivity, docility and amazing fidelity to the dynasty that his people displayed under the misfortunes that he was to bring upon them.

For the entire policy, internal and external, of Prussia since the death of Frederick the Great was committed to a direction that led straight to the catastrophe. The great captain had indeed conquered Silesia, and in doing so augmented the territory of his State by a third. He had taken a share in the First Partition of Poland and thus acquired West Prussia, the Polish enclave that separated the ancient possessions of the House of Hohenzollern. But this man, for all his unbridled ambition, had always abstained from intervening in those European affairs which did not affect his immediate interests.

With the advent of Frederick William II all this was changed. In 1787 he sent his troops into Holland to re-establish the authority of the Stadthouder. He intervened in Poland to overthrow the insurrection of Kosciuszko, and the Second and Third Partitions of Poland (1793—

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1795) added to his domains vast territories inhabited by Slavs, and inordinately extended the Prussian frontier up to Bialystok. Warsaw became a Prussian city. And last of all, he decided to take arms against Revolutionary France, hoping no doubt to re-establish Louis XVI as he had re-established the Dutch Regent.

The unfortunate consequences of this last enterprise led to an abrupt change of tactics; after the conclusion of the Treaty of Basle in 1795 Prussia limited herself to a policy of absolute neutrality. On his accession, Frederick William III, under the advice of his foreign minister Count Haugwitz and the intriguer Lombard — descendant of French Huguenots — who was his Cabinet Secretary, continued this policy, which was entirely in accord with his undecided character and his vague humanitarian inclinations. 'Peace makes the happiness of peoples,' said the young king. This line of conduct, attractive enough in itself, was nevertheless extremely difficult to follow in practice, at a moment when the upheaval produced by the French Revolution was setting all the Great Powers of Europe by the ears. At this decisive moment of world history, one had either to take sides with the Revolution and Napoleon Bonaparte or to join and swell the ranks of their adversaries. But the Prussia of Frederick William III found itself simply adrift and incapable of firm decisions. The history, so often related, of the diplomatic dealings of Prussia with France from 1795 to 1806 presents from first to last an unbroken series of compoundings, hesitations, and evasions, and leaves a lamentable impression of feebleness and knavery.

And yet this hopeless foreign policy would not necessarily have led to the disaster of 1806 had the Prussian State managed to maintain the framework of its strong internal organization intact. But what happened was precisely the opposite.

With the death of Frederick II the old fabric of Prussia went to pieces. Under the regime of his successor's favourites the zeal of the Prussian bureaucracy slackened: 'it lost the only qualities it had, its blind respect for discipline, without acquiring independence in exchange'. This king, the adept of occultism, declared war on the 'philosophy of Light' that Frederick II had favoured, and set up a 'supervisory commission' over school education which in fact was a sort of Protestant Inquisition. In turn, Frederick William III, after some reforming impulses, soon lapsed into rigorous measures against the Press and every other expression of free thought. As a result of these measures and counter-measures, public spirit became profoundly demoralized. The last two Partitions of Poland were followed by scandalous confiscations of land for the benefit of unworthy favourites. On the accession of Frederick William III two honest men, Zerboni and Held, tried to open the eyes of the king to the ill-doings and dishonesties of Count Hoym, the governor of Silesia, but their reward was state prison, and the powerful governor retained his place. By degrees corruption pervaded the army; captains of companies displayed their ingenuity in finding ways to send as much as two-thirds of their men on leave, so that they might make more or less legitimate gains on their food and clothing. As to those who remained with the colours, their supplies were obtained at minimum prices and at minimum quality. All was sacrificed to parade routine; generals walked along the ranks with a measure to see if the pigtails were of correct length. Punctuality became the soldier's supreme virtue, and sergeants who possessed several watches were marked men for promotion. The self-sufficient levity and arrogance of the officers became intolerable. 'In the army, caprice and presumption,' writes Philippon.¹ 'No spirit of sacrifice, no devotion to

¹ *Geschichte des preussischen Staatswesens*, Leipzig, 1882.

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king and country. In the administration, intrigues indolence, routine, jealousy, efficiency low and zeal still lower. In the upper classes a love of enjoyment and dislike of effort, a spirit of dogmatizing, laying down the law, and criticizing everything, no strength of will or of thought. Such was the condition of Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century.'

And it was in this lamentable condition that she entered upon the decisive years of the new century.

To save the heritage of the great Frederick from the inevitable bankruptcy would have needed a very great reformer. Stein had in him the makings of one. When he was called to Berlin in 1804 he had reached the age of maturity. 'I am no longer a young man making his entry into the world to devote himself to the seven liberal arts,' he said, adding modestly, 'I am only an old tree that bears dry fruit.' But his youthful vigour was intact, as he was to show amply enough in the sequel. The nobility of his character, the independence of his judgment and his vast experience of affairs — all predestined him to a political role in the front rank. He had had plenty of opportunities of judging the weaknesses of the regime. Even in 1797 he was writing to his brother that 'the Ministers are reduced to the role of principal clerks dealing with the day's routine. Their position no longer possesses prestige. There is no longer cohesion in the work; it is just an incoherent aggregate of puerilities'.

Two years later again, in April 1709: 'As for our army, we amuse ourselves with conjuring tricks executed by ballet-masters and military tailors. Our State has ceased to be a military state; its functions are reduced to barrack-square exercises and *paperaiserie*. I have only to call up in my mind the figures of the influential men who direct us . . . to lose all hope!'

But a new ideology was beginning to take shape in his soul. 'The despotic governments crush the character of the nation by keeping it out of public affairs and confiding their administration to a routine-ridden and intriguing bureaucracy.' So he expressed himself in a letter to the king's near relative Prince Louis Ferdinand, with whom he had been on terms of friendship since Minden days. Already, as thereafter, he was haunted by the vision of a grand and thoroughly revolutionary reform, based on the national characteristics of the Germans and the free institutions of their medieval period more than on any abstract theories of the 'Rights of Man'.

. But it was not in the capacity of a reformer that Stein was summoned to sit in the councils of the Prussian government. His coming on the stage of Berlin in no way resembled the sensational entry of Turgot upon that of Versailles. He was simply an official arriving by seniority at the position of 'Chief Clerk'. The king had approved the nomination with an exceedingly ill grace; already he felt a profound antipathy towards this 'eccentric genius', and only yielded to the advice of his counsellors who, for fear of losing an eminent servant of the Crown, had insisted on the choice of Stein for the vacancy created by the death of the minister Struensee.

In itself the post did not amount to much. While the puissant King of France contented himself with five ministers, the King of Prussia had no less than fourteen. The division of respective fields of authority, and for that matter the whole central organization, were among the oddest things in the old Prussian machinery. There were three independent organs. First there was the 'Cabinet Ministry', the king's executive organ for general policy and foreign affairs; this Ministry was directed by two heads with identical functions and frequently differing ideas. Next there was a Ministry of Justice, and after that the

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rest of the business was under the 'General Directorate of Domains, Finance and War', an excessively bizarre and complicated department. The members of the Directorate ranked as ministers. The attributions of some of them were territorial, i.e. they were chief administrators of East Prussia, Pomerania, Westphalia, and so on. Some, on the other hand, dealt with particular activities for the whole kingdom, finances, crown estates, army supply, etc. Outside these three great departments there were the Higher War Administration and — to complete the illogical picture — a special Minister for the Province of Silesia. Further, these ministers (with the exception of those concerned with foreign affairs) had no regular access to the king. The General Directorate sat in commissions, each composed of several ministers, took decisions by majority of votes and submitted them for the royal approval in the form of written reports to the 'King's Cabinet'.

It was the members of *this* Cabinet (which must not be confused with the 'Cabinet Ministry', alias Foreign Office, mentioned above) who were the real holders of power; men of obscure origin and generally less than mediocre capacity, but entitled to see the king and influence his decisions at all times. So low had fallen the organization of the great Frederick, who had himself 'alone directed the machinery of State . . . and settled the most important affairs and the most trivial details alike with a stroke of the pen in his Cabinet'.¹

Very limited, then, were the powers that Stein acquired when he took over, with ministerial rank, the Department of Commerce and Finance in the General Directorate. From the legal point of view, general policy was completely outside his sphere. And in assuming office he was under no

¹ Lombard, *Matériaux pour servir à l'histoire des années 1805, 1806 et 1807*, Leipzig, 1808.

illusions as to this. 'At present my first and only occupation,' he wrote, 'will be to get myself posted on the state of affairs by attentively studying the files and making inquiries on the spot.'

But a great personality shows itself even in a restricted field. No sooner was he installed than he decided to carry out the radical reform of abolishing custom barriers between the different provinces, in accordance with the famous principle of *laissez-faire, laissez-passer*.

After a year of preparatory work, this reform was promulgated by royal decree on September 26th, 1805. With that, a whole system of worm-eaten scaffolding collapsed; hundreds of obsolete taxes, of confused and unmeaning tariffs (Brandenburg alone had no less than twenty of these), vanished for good, and Prussia thus rid herself, like revolutionary France, of one of the most serious obstacles to the rise of her commercial activity.

Stein had found the Salt Department in a state of complete disorganization, 'a veritable Augean stable', as Count Schulenburg, the president of the General Directorate, called it. For years past attempts had been made to straighten out this administration, but in vain. Stein, however, was not long in finding a neat solution. The Salt Directorate was simply abolished, its business was divided among various other departments interested and thenceforward all went in the best possible way. Equally promptly, he carried out a reform of indirect taxation in East and West Prussia. Another and far wider project, for which time was not to be vouchsafed to him, looked to the equalization of excises throughout the kingdom, but he reorganized the administration of customs and taxation from top to bottom by simplifying the work of central direction. He created the first statistical bureau in Prussia, and so laid the foundations of an institution that was destined to a great future.

THE HEIRS OF FREDERICK THE GREAT

As regards the obsolete regime of Prussian industry, Stein envisaged from the outset a radical transformation. 'A wise administration,' he wrote to the Minister Hoym, 'should set itself to destroy the guild spirit and its code of regulations that is inspired by cupidity and ignorance.' Hoym submitted this letter to the king, who expressed disapproval, and Stein had thereafter to confine himself within bounds of prudence, pursuing a sort of 'liberal mercantilism', creating professional schools and factory inspectorates and introducing improved methods in textile production.

In the field of finance, he carried out a complete reorganization of the Bank of Prussia. He had found the affairs of this institution in a deplorable state; sums that were for the period enormous had been locked up in long-term investments, loans granted to the great landed proprietors — the eternal Prussian policy that we have seen revived in our own day in the form of the 'Osthilfe'. Stein put an end to this kind of operation, declaring that 'he refused to have his name used to sanction the pillage and dispersion of public funds'. The direction of the bank was confided to an outstanding man, Niebuhr — the same who was later to acquire a world reputation as a historian.

But when all is said and done, these activities of Stein during the two years of his ministry, though a creditable page in Prussian administrative history, present nothing of general interest — hundreds of statesmen, Prussian and other, have achieved as much. These partial reforms had no relation to the work of regeneration which Prussia was awaiting. But it was only gradually and under the influence of external events, that Stein came to understand that more was needed, and that what he was doing was merely to perfect a machine that was running idle.

It was the eleventh hour when he saw thus clearly the danger that menaced the kingdom of Prussia — the State

to which he had bound his own fortunes, the heritage of Frederick the Great, the pledge of Germany's future grandeur. On April 27th, 1806, he signed a memoir to the king in which he advocated a radical change of regime. We shall have to return to this, and meanwhile it will suffice to quote the closing phrases of this historic document. 'The causes and the men that have brought us to the edge of the abyss will push us over into it. . . . Anyone who studies the story of the end of Venice, the fall of the French and Sardinian monarchies, will find in these precedents enough to justify the most tragic forebodings. . . . If your Royal Majesty decides against accepting the proposed changes and continues to act under the influence of your Cabinet, your Majesty must expect the dissolution of the Prussian State, or the loss of its independence and the disappearance of the respect and love of Your subjects.'

These prophetic words were written in vain; they never even reached the king. A few months later Prussia foundered in the catastrophe of Jena.

CHAPTER VI

THE CATASTROPHE

THE impartial historian cannot relieve Stein of his part of the responsibility for the fatal policy which led Prussia to the crash of 1806. Most of the German biographers of the Reichsfreiherr glide over the subject, but nevertheless Ritter, the most recent of them, is obliged to recognize that on the eve of the decisive events Stein had become, by degrees, the head of the opposition group which pushed the Government into abandoning its neutrality policy.

'He had,' says Ritter, 'become the most eminent spokesman of that patriotic emotion which had caught the educated classes of Germany, and of Prussia in particular. . . . He appears to us as a passionate supporter of a war policy, and it was not even political considerations, but the voice of his conscience, that roused him to fight against the universal empire of the French.'

Thus in a note addressed to the king on October 26th, 1805, he spoke of the unheard-of extension of the French power, the inordinate ambition of Napoleon, the impudence of the emperor in suppressing the liberties of all his neighbours and violating the neutrality of Prussia,¹ and lastly the contempt he had displayed for the German Empire in the kidnapping of the unfortunate Duc d'Enghien. 'It is imperative,' said Stein, 'to resist such aggressions if the European equilibrium is to be restored.'

In his capacity as Finance Minister, he did his best to prove to the king that such a struggle was not beyond the material resources of the country. Prussian governments

¹ In marching through Anspach, a Prussian enclave, during the advance on Ulm. — TRANSLATOR

in the past had always regarded war finance in the simplest possible way; to engage in a war one must have a 'treasure'. Thus Frederick William I had bequeathed to his heir a sum of 8,700,000 thalers, and thus had enabled the great king to embark on his first military operations. At Frederick's death the treasure amounted to 55,000,000. Under the reckless administration of his successor this had been dissipated and debts had even been contracted to the amount of 48,000,000. In these conditions, Frederick William III considered war to be out of the question. But Stein — the first to do so — enunciated a new theory. He recommended not only the contracting of fresh debts but the issue of inconvertible paper money, after the example of France and England. Further, he declared himself in favour of an income-tax — a definitely revolutionary measure in the case of Prussia, in that it could not be reconciled with the regime of caste privilege.

Stein's warlike ideas were shared by others besides the brainless young Guard officers who, on the eve of the campaign of Jena, sharpened their swords on the steps of the French Embassy. A whole coterie of serious and influential men were of the same opinion — for instance the young Prince Louis Ferdinand, Stein's friend, who was soon to meet a heroic death in the battle of Saalfeld, his sister Princess Louise Radziwill, a fervent admirer of the Minister, the Prince of Orange, the young Duke of Brunswick, and Generals Phull and Blücher.

The warlike policy of these men was to bring suffering enough on Prussia. And yet the tribunal of history is forced to admit more than one extenuating circumstance in favour of Stein and his supporters; one need only, in fact, put one's self in the position of a Prussian and imagine the state of indignation and fury roused in him by the constant provocations of Napoleon and his tyrannical grip on Europe.

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Further, Stein and his coterie never contemplated Prussia's taking the field in such deplorable conditions as those which actually happened in 1806. In their view, war should be preceded by a large-scale diplomatic operation and a series of radical reforms in the interior regime of the country. But neither of these things was done.

From the outset Stein favoured what in our day is called the 'Russian orientation'. The Tsar Alexander I had come to Berlin in 1805 and sealed his friendship with the King of Prussia in the oaths sworn between them in a moving midnight interview at the tomb of Frederick the Great. On the occasion of this visit Stein had made Alexander's acquaintance, and had been captivated by the young Emperor. He praises 'his comprehension of true civilization, his great efforts to spread education and morals'. He had satisfied himself that 'Alexander had no hostile disposition towards Prussia and no desire for aggrandisement in Europe'. With such an ally at her side Prussia might safely, he said, undertake the struggle against the 'most formidable man in Europe'. But it would be necessary that the alliance should be a real one!

We cannot, without going beyond the field of this book, enter into the details of the final negotiations between Frederick William III, Alexander and Napoleon which preceded the appearance of the Conqueror on the battle-fields of Prussia. For a general view, it will be sufficient to recall the outstanding facts.

The initial blunder was committed by Prussia in 1803-4 in acquiescing in the occupation of the Electorate of Hanover by Napoleon's troops. In doing so, she allowed the Emperor to instal himself in the midst of the Prussian possessions, and at the very heart of the empire, and she forfeited her chance of taking up the position that she had claimed, ever since 1795, as defender of North German neutrality. More than this, her very status as a Great

Power, was lost by the still graver errors of 1805. On the occasion of the interview with Alexander, Frederick William had promised the Tsar his mediation with Napoleon and in case of non-success the support of the Prussian army. He sent his minister Haugwitz to Moravia, where Napoleon was making ready to fall upon the allied forces of Austria and Russia. But Haugwitz's shifts and postponements went on just too long. The 'Sun of Austerlitz' rose on the emperor's most brilliant victory, and instead of a haughty summons, Napoleon received humble congratulations — 'a compliment', he observed, 'of which Fortune has changed the address'. A few days later at Schönbrunn Haugwitz signed a treaty of alliance by which Prussia, ceding various small enclaves (Berg, Cleve, Anspach, Bayreuth, Neufchâtel), obtained Hanover. It was an important acquisition. But unfortunately the Electorate in question belonged to England, and Prussia could not take possession of it without making a mortal enemy of that Power, which, to make matters worse, had just promised her considerable subsidies. 'One should be ashamed henceforth to call one's self a Prussian and to serve Prussia,' wrote an intimate friend of Stein, the Councillor Vincke.

Stein himself, in a letter to the king's confidant Beyme, said that 'he considered Haugwitz's conduct dyed with duplicity and criminal cowardice; it only confirmed the feeling of profound contempt he had always entertained for that sycophant'. But like all his contemporaries, Stein was unaware that Haugwitz had acted, during his stay in Napoleon's camp, in strict conformity with secret instructions given him verbally by the king.

Recovered from the first shock, Stein took up a calmer attitude. He wrote to Vincke: 'If a great moral and intellectual force had guided the State, it would have used the Coalition to liberate Europe from the French grip before it was struck down at Austerlitz. But this

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force did not exist. I do not think of reproaching a man to whom Nature has refused her gifts' — a palpable allusion to Frederick William — 'any more than you could reproach me for not possessing the genius of Newton.' The letter ends on a pietist note: 'I recognize in this the will of Providence; only faith and resignation are left to us.'

But the cup of humiliation was not yet full. The king having displayed some hesitations over the ratification of the disastrous Schönbrunn treaty, Napoleon imposed still harder conditions. The treaty signed at Paris on February 15th, 1806, required Prussia to close her ports to British shipping and commerce. War with Great Britain was henceforth inevitable.

Stein, as Minister of Commerce, knew better than anyone what sacrifices this adhesion to the Continental blockade would entail on the economy of Prussia. He roused the whole General Directorate, and got Schrötter, the Chief Administrator of East and West Prussia, to tell the king that 'the bloodiest war could not be so fatal to us as this attack on the very foundation of our wealth'. 'While our weapons remain unused,' continued Schrötter, 'we stand condemned to a self-inflicted death by the slow poison of exhaustion and despair.'

At the same time, Stein made representations to Haugwitz at Paris, in the vain hope of obtaining some alleviation of the burden that threatened to crush their country. Finally, he addressed the king himself. The situation of Prussia, he declared, was now more lamentable than that of a small country like Portugal. The Portuguese had regained freedom of navigation by the payment of subsidies, but Prussia had sacrificed her prosperity to French friendship without obtaining anything in return. He set out to prove by figures that it was to the interest of France herself to maintain the freedom of Prussian navigation. And he continued, in an access of impotent rage: 'In order

to study this question impartially, I put myself in the position of a subject or official of Napoleon. For the nonce I was prepared to admit that it would be a great blessing to humanity if all Europe were under his sway, with our monarchs transformed into prefects, our ambassadors into deputies and our states into departments. I imagined myself one of those who had fought under Napoleon's flag, sat on his Council, or that I had rendered him still more important service in the armies and cabinets of his adversaries by betraying them and paralysing their activities.' (The allusion to Haugwitz and the other advisers of the King could scarcely be clearer.) 'And after all this, I put the question to myself, is the ruin of Prussian navigation useful to France? I did not let myself be swayed any longer by my devotion to Germany and to my King, by considerations of duty and of honour; I made myself feel with the servile spirit of the Mameluke Roustan or the impure sentiments of a bought and sold mercenary, paralysed physically and morally. "I do not need the gratitude of France. I have only one aspiration, to make the great Emperor understand his own interest."' "

Such language from Stein to his sovereign was truly unusual. But the anger and indignation of the great minister will not surprise us in the least if we think of the terrible situation that the weakness and duplicity of Prussia's domestic policy had produced at this moment — Napoleon's France settled in an attitude of haughty disdain and her demands ever increasing: Great Britain in a declared state of war: the Russian ally abandoned in her defeat, betrayed in the face of all oaths of fidelity; Austria annihilated. . . .

Still, Stein was far from having lost all hope. More and more the idea of saving Prussia by internal reform of the regime became anchored in his mind, and it was at this moment that he wrote the famous memorandum of April

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27th, 1806, of which we have already quoted the prophetic conclusions. This document merits the most attentive analysis, for it attacks the basic cause of Prussia's decline — absolutism and government by 'Cabinet'.

To justify the step he was taking, Stein began by declaring that, in the perilous situation of the country, it was the duty of a statesman not only to seek measures of salvation, but also to throw himself unreservedly into their realization, with a noble truth for ideal. 'Prussia,' he continued, 'does not possess a State "constitution"; the supreme power is not shared between the Sovereign and the representatives of the Nation.'¹ "Therefore, since at the moment there could be no question of providing the State with a constitution, it was all the more necessary to reorganize the "constitution of the Government".'

A new institution had gradually taken shape during the preceding reigns, and had acquired a preponderating influence from the accession of Frederick William III. This 'Cabinet of the King', though without legal existence and irresponsible, handled the entire power and took the definitive decisions in all matters of State. All that remained, then, of the powers of the ministers was simply the execution of measures imposed on them and the responsibility therefor towards the King and the public. The dignity of the highest functionaries of the State was profoundly impaired by their being thus put in a condition of inferiority. 'One is almost ashamed to hold a post wherein one has only the shadow of power.' And if a minister succeeds in stifling his legitimate indignation, he inevitably loses his sentiment of duty. In either case the strongest springs of his activity are paralysed.

And what became of the Monarch in all this? 'He lived,' declared Stein, 'completely separated from his ministers,

¹ Compare Article 16 of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man*: 'A society in which the laws are not guaranteed and the separation of powers defined, has no constitution.'

with whom he has no direct relation, no personal relation, not even a correspondence relation.' The consequence for the king was that he was completely dependent on his entourage, and could not possibly obtain a comprehensive view of the condition of affairs.

The defects of the system might have been counter-balanced by high moral and intellectual qualities in this entourage. But who, in fact, were the men who enjoyed the sovereign's confidence? The Councillor Beyme, a man full of pride and insolence, devoid of the knowledge required in the domain of high policy; the Councillor Lombard, in charge of the diplomatic correspondence, 'a French poetaster of low extraction', a corrupt roué who divides his time between gaming and escapades; the Minister von Haugwitz, smooth-spoken and pliant, debauched and unscrupulous, who wears himself out in sensual pleasures.

In Stein's view, it was imperative therefore that the Prussian governmental regime should be completely transformed. Unworthy counsellors should be dismissed at once, and all affairs of state concentrated in the hands of five responsible ministers (War, Foreign, Interior, Justice, Finance) sitting in council under the actual presidency of the king, and taking its decisions by majority vote. The 'Cabinet Councillors' should be brought back to their proper status as subordinate functionaries of the Royal Secretariat.

The measures proposed in this document, mild as they may appear to our own generation, amounted to a revolution in the eyes of Stein's. A very German revolution indeed, made up of compromises and mental reservations, a revolution which introduced ministerial responsibility without creating national representation and replaced 'the King's good pleasure' by the hegemony of a group of bureaucrats. But, even as it was, it dealt a mortal blow to the fundamental principles of the old regime, and for this

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reason, if for no other, it was unrealizable. 'The old Monarchy had to be defeated on the field of battle,' writes the historian Lehmann, 'before it could accept a plan that in fact meant its own destruction.' The memoir might — or again might not — have had more chance if Stein, in drafting it, had kept within the limits of strict objectivity and not allowed his volcanic temperament to lead him into violent outraged-puritan diatribes against Beyme, Lombard and the rest. But as it was, who would have dared to submit to the king a document that loaded his best friends with abuse and curses? And some of this abuse — for instance in the case of Beyme, an official of high culture and perfect integrity — was absolutely unjustified.

So, in fact, no one could be found who would countersign the document, no one who would present it to the king. Queen Louise heard of it through her lady in waiting, Countess Voss, and approved it in principle, but thought its allegations too intemperate and passionate, and took no action. All that Stein could obtain, in the weeks and months following, was the presentation to the king of a Humble Address signed by some Royal Princes and Generals praying for the removal of Haugwitz and Lombard. The hope of radical reform thus came to nothing, and Prussia entered on the most decisive period of her existence in a state of diplomatic isolation and of complete internal disorganization.

X During the summer of 1806 events hurried to the climax. On August 6th Francis of Habsburg laid down the Imperial German crown.

A few weeks later the creation of the Confederation of the Rhine consecrated the definitive triumph of Napoleon over Germany. At last the king's eyes were opened; he learned that Napoleon was negotiating with Lord Yarmouth for the return of Hanover, the price of Prussia's treason. Wildly, he ordered the mobilization of the army and tried

at the last moment to re-establish relations with Russia, England and Sweden. He walked like a blind man towards the abyss. A haughty ultimatum ordered Napoleon to evacuate the whole of Germany and give up the Confederation of the Rhine. General Rüchel, aide-de-camp of the King and an intimate friend of Stein's, proclaimed to the garrison of Potsdam that the army of His Majesty could produce several generals equal to Herr von Bonaparte(!).

The story of the campaign of 1806 needs no repetition. 'Napoleon breathed on Prussia, and Prussia ceased to exist,' as Heine said. The forces of Frederick William III were annihilated in a single week (October 10-17) at Saalfeld, Jena and Auerstädt. Napoleon's marshals captured the strong Prussian fortresses with stupefying rapidity — Magdeburg, Spandau, Küstrin, Hameln. Blücher capitulated at Lübeck, 'having no more bread and no more ammunition'. Napoleon entered Berlin in triumph and installed a French administration there; seven Prussian ministers swore fidelity to him. The King, followed by the Queen and some faithful friends, without an army and out of touch with his ministers, fled desperately to the confines of his kingdom, tracked and chased by the advance guard of Napoleon's veterans. Never had the world witnessed such a collapse.

From this moment Stein enters upon the heroic period of his career. While the court, the government and the population of Prussia were disorganized, panic-stricken and prostrated, he was of the few that kept their heads and their heart.

For himself, the dissolution of the German Empire had had an important personal significance. His semi-sovereign barony was 'mediatized' and annexed by the Dukes of Nassau in the same autumn of 1806, and thus we find him writing, a few weeks before the declaration of war, 'Hence-

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forth I regard myself as a Prussian gentleman.' More than ever he identified his fortunes with those of the adopted country for which he had predicted a glorious future. 'On the eve of Jena he was still hopeful,' wrote Hardenberg in his journal.

When the news came of disaster, he was among the first to regain his nerve. On his instructions, all payments by the Prussian treasury were at once suspended and all money in hand swiftly removed from Berlin. Thanks to these energetic measures, Prussia retained the resources that in the sequel enabled her to carry on the war till the summer of 1807. While his colleagues in the General Directorate passed over to the service of the victor, he at least made haste to join his distressed king, and his family accompanied him into exile. His arrival at the King's headquarters roused hopes anew, and in a few days all were looking to him.

And then the inevitable happened. Two wills and two characters, so different as Stein's and Frederick William's, were bound to clash.

Destiny assigns men their places in life at hazard. Of the two natures it was Stein's that was at bottom the royal one, while the qualities and even the defects of Frederick William made him the very type of a good official. The roles were thus inverted and, in the dramatic circumstances of the moment, catastrophe was inevitable.

Prepared as one may be for pusillanimity and weakness in Frederick William III, one is astonished when one examines in detail the documents relating to his activity after Jena. History would find it difficult to produce a parallel to this Court in chaos, torn by the most conflicting emotions — fear, hate, obstinacy, insane hopes of recovering its prestige. From halting-place to halting-place across the vast Prussian plain, there were consultations and more consultations, time-wasting palavers and academic

discussions. Imagine the scene! Sleepy little towns and humble villages with names never heard of again till 1914 — Graudenz, Osterode, Wehlau — aggregations of red-brick houses dominated by the belfry of the Protestant church and surrounded by vast potato-fields; a population half German and half Lithuanian, blunted by misery, all taken aback by the appearance under its humble roofs of the first personages of the kingdom, with mere weak detachments of recruits to provide for their safety. And at last Königsberg, the old abandoned capital, and the grey mass of its castle receiving its august visitors with astonishment.

It was in this extraordinary atmosphere that they debated on war and peace, Napoleon and Alexander, the absolutist regime and constitutional reform, as though Royal decisions could still influence the course of events! Negotiations continued with the Emperor of the French, and at Graudenz they decided to make submission to the conqueror. But at Osterode on November 21st, at the instance of Stein, they refused to ratify the humiliating conditions of the Armistice of Charlottenburg which had been signed by the king's plenipotentiaries Lucchesini and Zastrow and announced by Napoleon in the 23rd Bulletin of the Grand Army. Ministers were dismissed, only to be reinstated in a few weeks. Nevertheless, this day at Osterode marks the first decisive success of Stein and the long-awaited disgrace of Haugwitz and Lombard.

Frederick William now realized that he had at his side a statesman of unequalled worth, whose energy and clear-sightedness might serve to prop up his collapsing monarchy. He offered Stein the portfolios of Foreign Affairs and the Interior in turn. He envisaged the creation of a triumvirate consisting of Stein for the Interior, Zastrow for Foreign Affairs and Rüchel for War, with Beyme as Cabinet Secretary.

To the king's great surprise, Freiherr vom Stein returned

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a flat refusal. He, and only he, was under no illusion — as if this were the moment to talk about portfolios! It was the 'system' that must take the consequence of defeat, and it was the ideas, as already set forth in the famous note, that must prevail. But Frederick William III did not understand it so, and when Stein demanded the abolition of the 'Cabinet of the King' and the definitive resignation of Haugwitz, Lombard and Beyme, the King wrote on the margin of the report, 'Do people take me for an imbecile?' Mediocre as were his capacities, he was not an imbecile. His blind obstinacy is not to be explained by either madness or stupidity. The existence of the 'King's Cabinet' had acquired for him a symbolic importance; it was not a discredited institution that he was defending, but the very essence of the unlimited power he had inherited from his ancestors. Absolute king he was, and absolute king he intended to remain.¹

Stein had refused the portfolios of Foreign Affairs on the pretext of unfitness for the post, and had pushed the candidature of Hardenberg, whose dismissal Napoleon had required. He had equally refused to participate in the Triumvirate as Minister of the Interior. But he could not make up his mind to abandon the king in ill-fortune, though he was already avoiding personal contact for fear of violent scenes; he confined himself therefore to dealing with the few matters of current business that the officials of the Finance Ministry submitted to him.

A chance incident ended the state of 'latent rebellion' in which Stein now found himself. A member of the Government who had remained at Berlin had asked for instructions as to payments to be made for maintenance of

¹ We have seen something of the same kind in our own day on the occasion of the promulgation of the constitutional rescript of Nicholas II in October 1905. The passionate discussions that took place between the Tsar, Count Witte and the other dignitaries seem almost incomprehensible to laymen; they turned on words and phrases and formulae, but it was the very existence of the Russian autocracy that was at stake.

Napoleon's court there, and these payments he made, on the personal order of the King, without the minister having been informed at all. Stein, when he learned of it, exploded with indignation. 'Has one ever heard of a monarch, defeated and driven from the greater part of his kingdom, being charged with the cost of the conqueror's court?' He refused in the most categorical way to sanction the despatch of any further sums, and Stein and the King were face to face at last. . . .

On January 3rd, 1807, on the eve of his departure from Königsberg to Memel, Frederick William III addressed to his great servant a letter that has remained mournfully famous in the annals of the Prussian Monarchy. 'I am deceived in you,' declared the King. 'I shall regard you henceforth as an official animated by a spirit of systematic and offensive opposition, insubordinate and obstinate. In the pride of your genius and your talents, you are far from devoting yourself to the public good; you let yourself be guided by caprices, passions, hate and personal rancour. . . . Such state officials are extremely dangerous, fatal to the community. I regret that you have compelled me to write to you in such categorical terms, but since you always claim to be a man who loves truth above all things, I tell you my opinion in good round German. I should like to add that if you do not mean to change your incorrect and disrespectful attitude, the State can hardly count upon your services.'¹

The baron received this missive at the very moment when he was about to give the King a supreme proof of devotion in abandoning his sick and almost dying daughter to follow Frederick William in his perilous journey towards the Russian frontier. Without interrupting his preparations for departure, Stein wrote his letter of resignation, which was

¹ The text of the draft of this letter contains a phrase, crossed out, in which the king threatens Stein with fortress imprisonment.

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transmitted to the King next morning. The German archives still possess the scrap of paper on which the King without a kingdom scribbled his final answer: 'Freiherr vom Stein had passed judgment on himself in his letter of yesterday. I have nothing to add.'

The catastrophe was consummated.

CHAPTER VII

A GERMAN WOMAN—QUEEN LOUISE

IN the Tiergarten, that great park which lies in the midst of the aristocratic quarter of Berlin, there is a quiet and unobtrusive corner. In it rises a statue, surrounded by thick bushes and never-empty flower beds, on the marge of a little romantic pool. The figure is that of a beautiful woman, her open forehead banded with a Directoire fillet. It is the monument of German gratitude to a great queen.

Beyond the Rhine, the memory of Queen Louise of Prussia is a passionate cult. They venerate in her the personification of all the virtues of the German woman, and they venerate in her, besides, the mother of the Prince William who was to become the emperor of 1871, the modern Iphigenia who sacrificed herself to the conqueror at Tilsit in the vain hope of saving her country, and lastly, the woman who made its resurrection sure by bringing Stein back to power.

The appearance of this gracious figure illumines the sombre and tragic life of the Reichsfreiherr like a shaft of sunlight. The biographer of Stein must therefore linger awhile over it — an incidental figure perhaps, but one that played, if only for an instant, a decisive part in the destiny of a great man.

Augusta Wilhelmina Amelia Luise, Princess of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, born on March 10th, 1776, was the daughter of Prince Charles, general in the Hanoverian service, and of a Princess of Hesse Darmstadt. She received a French education, but also the impress of her pious German governesses. The poverty of her father scarcely permitted her to aspire to a brilliant match. But in 1793,

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when she and her sister were staying at Frankfurt, chance put her in the presence of King Frederick William II of Prussia who was about to take the field accompanied by his two sons. It was this debauched old king who, as a finished connoisseur of women, was the first to appreciate the charm of the young princess. 'Looking at these two angels,' he wrote, 'I was not only struck by their beauty, I was transported. I wanted my sons to see and fall in love with them, and to the best of my ability I saw to it that they did. Love ensued, and the double marriage was settled on the spot,' to take place, in fact, at Berlin on December 23rd of the same year. Some weeks before the ceremony, Goethe saw the two princesses in the camp of the Prussian army, and hailed 'this divine apparition amidst the tumults of war'.

Louise of Prussia possessed in the highest degree the gift of conquering all hearts. To judge by the unanimous witness of contemporaries, an extraordinary charm emanated from her. Princess Dorothea of Courland (the future Duchesse de Dino and friend of Talleyrand) writes in her memoirs: 'Her beauty was truly royal. Though she was taller than most women, the proportions of her figure were perfect. Her shoulders, her bust, were incomparable, her complexion dazzling. Her hair was slightly auburn, her forehead noble, her eyes full of gentleness, her lips vermilion. Her neck and the movements of her head were of unequalled elegance. Possibly her teeth were not as brilliant as might have been wished, her hands, though white, were a little too powerful and her foot was rather bad; but these slight imperfections were more than redeemed by the majestic ensemble of her whole person.'

Madame Vigée Lebrun, who painted her portrait in 1801, is not less emphatic: 'The pen is powerless to convey the impression that was made on me the first time I saw this princess. The charm of her heavenly face, which expressed

benevolence, kindness rather, and the lines of which were so regular, so fine; the beauty of her figure, her neck, her arms, the dazzling freshness of her complexion; all of her, in short, was more ravishing than anything one could possibly imagine.' General de Ségur, too, bursts into hyperbole of praise: 'I think I see this princess before me still, half-reclining on a sofa, a golden tripod by her side and a shawl of Oriental purple about her exquisite figure. There was in the tone of her voice so harmonious a beauty — in her words something so lovable and touching in the way she held them — such grace and such majesty, that for a moment I would believe myself in the presence of a fairy-tale apparition.' A noble Polish lady who watched her dancing at the Spa of Pyrmont in 1806, expected wings to appear on her at any moment. But the supreme homage is Madame de Staël's; writing to her father she says that 'after being presented to the beautiful Queen I almost lost the power of speech' (for the first and last time in her life, remark the malicious German historians).

With such physical advantages Louise of Prussia possessed, besides, moral qualities of a very high order. Von Gentz, the Austrian statesman and politician, pays homage to this remarkable woman in this wise: 'At every moment in an interview lasting three-quarters of an hour she expressed herself with a precision, a firmness, an energy and withal with a moderation and prudence that would have enchanted me in a man; and yet she infused it all with a sensibility that never let me forget for a moment that it was a woman I was admiring. Not a word that was out of place: not a sentiment or a reflection that was out of tune with the general character of what she said: the whole an ensemble of dignity, sweetness and charm such as I think I have never met.'

She has been compared to Marie Antoinette, but the comparison lacks point, for these two women had nothing

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in common but the love of dancing and of country pleasures. Louise's spirit, lively and impressionable, was penetrated with a sincere piety. 'My whole nature is stamped with love of human beings,' she wrote. 'I long so much to know that all humanity is happy and to contribute to that happiness at whatever cost to myself.' She possessed a great sense of humour; it appears in every line of her youthful correspondence, written in a delicious mixture of schoolroom French and popular German, as for instance when in sending a pair of socks to her august spouse she humbly solicits her appointment to the 'permanent post of knitter to His Majesty'. Fervent reader of poetry, admirer alike of Schiller's tragedies and Jean Paul Richter's romantic novels, she was drawn towards that sentimental, dreamy and half-melancholy exaltation that the Germans describe by the untranslatable word *Schwärmerei*. In fine, a typical representative of the German Pre-Romanticism, a 'beautiful soul', in the clouds, but at the same time a faithful and devoted wife who found the greatest happiness of her life in the bosom of her family, in the calm retreat of a little country property near Potsdam. 'Come quickly,' she wrote to her absent husband. 'We'll dance and sing, and I'll be once more your silly Louise, your dear little Princess. . . . Provided the zealous servant of Mars loves me still, I'll gladly leave to Venus her beauty and her graces. What I have got is, happiness.'

During the first years of her husband's reign, Louise kept out of public affairs. The author, already mentioned, of a curious 'Note on certain personages in Prussia in 1800', considers her as a woman 'without wit or education'. 'It is said that she is kind, but I would rather call her accommodating,' continues this informant. 'Being the most beautiful of all the women about Court, she possesses the heart of her husband exclusively, but at the same time she does not govern him. She will never have any influence in state

affairs. . . . In all the entourage of the Queen there is no one with brains enough to give him what she cannot. People say, by the way, that at the very beginning of his reign, the king told her that she was never to interfere, or speak to him about state affairs. It will not be difficult for her to obey this order, with her lack of interest in everything but pleasure, and so her influence will be limited to nominating a few chamberlains and contriving advantageous marriages for her maids of honour. It is fortunate for France that it will go no further, for, as the daughter of the Duke of Mecklenburg-Strelitz, the Queen of England's brother (who has a pension from Parliament), she has been brought up to hate the Revolution and the Republic. French *émigrés*, indeed, she may welcome with a certain emphasis — they have easier access to her, in fact, than to her husband — but, definitely, she does not like French Republicans.'

All these forecasts were wrong. By 1805 Queen Louise was involved in the whirlwind of high politics. She had at this time conceived an enthusiastic admiration for the Emperor Alexander of Russia, in whom she saw the personification of her yearnings towards the ideal — 'a Schiller hero come down to earth'. 'In you perfection is incarnate,' she wrote to him, 'one must know you to know perfection.' It may or may not have been necessary for Alexander to protect himself from the princess's passionate outbursts by double-locking himself in his room at nights like a new Joseph holding off the temptress, but in actual fact Louise's soaring enthusiasm remained platonic, or, rather, found its sublimation on the political plane, in that midnight interview when, in her presence, the sovereigns exchanged oaths of eternal fidelity in the crypt of Potsdam.

Apart from her Russian sympathies, indeed, Louise had no defined policy, letting herself rather be guided by moral and sentimental considerations. 'The horizon is dark,' she

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wrote to her mother at the beginning of 1806, 'it is the devils that hold the power and the righteous must submit. The diadem is heavy to wear for any one who would stay good and honourable. I would gladly give twenty and keep only two years of my life, if so peace could be had for Germany and for Europe.' But she saw more clearly every day that the aggressions of 'this infamous colossus of a Napoleon' were making a policy of peace impossible. 'He wants only slaves as instruments of his will,' she wrote. 'I am certain that every Prussian would sooner give his last drop of blood than commit the infamy of becoming an ally — or a slave, for it comes to the same thing — of the French.' She compared the Emperor to 'a highwayman demanding your money or your life', and she foresaw in well-founded anguish 'the day when this offspring of Hell will make Germans cut Germans' throats'.

And so she came to regard war as inevitable. In the summer of 1806 she wrote to her husband: 'Force against force, in my opinion that is the only thing. We have a good ally, let us profit thereby.' The order for the mobilization of the army was made without her knowledge — whatever may have been said to the contrary — for she was on holiday at the time, but she approved it with pride as 'an act of honour and duty'.

Her fidelity to the German cause and to idealist aspiration had attracted to her the sympathies of the Prussian patriots. As early as 1805 people at Berlin began to talk of the 'Queen's Party', and during the dark period of the campaign she conquered the hearts of her people for ever. On the *via dolorosa* from Jena to Königsberg she dominated everyone by her force of character. 'Never for a moment', noted an eye-witness, the Swedish minister Brinckmann, 'did her heroic courage and firmness fail.' 'The Queen alone felt all the shame and misery that had come upon the army and the country,' wrote a young Russian officer,

Benckendorf, brother of the famous Princess Lieven. She lamented openly before him that the King yielded where he should not have yielded, and met friendly counsels with blind obstinacy. 'This man would manage to lose ten more kingdoms.'

Louise remained true to herself in the awful testing-time of January 1807, when the Prussian court, on the morrow of the breach between the King and Stein, began its new flight to Memel. To shorten the journey, use was made of a narrow sand-spit swept by tempest and snow and the waves of the unchained sea. The nights were spent in miserable huts, and on one occasion the Queen, barely recovered from a severe fever, passed the whole night in a tiny room with the snow pouring on to her bed through the broken window-pane. 'The climate here is terrible,' she wrote from Memel. 'Nothing but ice and snow. Not the smallest flower, the least violet. But my heart flowers still, and my hope in God will never die.' She hoped too in Alexander, 'our saviour and support'. She saw him again at Memel, 'moved, grave and yet so great, so generous'.

But the Russians lost the battle of Friedland, and the famous Tilsit interview followed. On June 25th, when the two Emperors met on the raft of the Niemen to seal their reconciliation and decide the fate of Prussia, Frederick William of Hohenzollern waited in the pouring rain, hidden in the Tsar's suite under a Russian officer's cloak. All the world knows that towards Prussia Napoleon was pitiless. He exacted the cession of half her territory — all the Slav lands acquired in the Partitions of Poland and all the provinces that she held west of the Elbe. All the world knows, too, that he refused to discuss the political situation at all with Frederick William, and that when he did admit the King to his society, treated him with scorn.

It was at this supreme moment of distress that there arose in the Prussian camp the fantastic idea that the situation



The Tsar Alexander received in Memel by King Friedrich Wilhelm III and Queen Louise of Prussia

might be saved by the intercession of the beautiful Queen. Murat had spoken of it to Field-Marshal Kalkreuth. No doubt that handsome cavalier found Memel a bore and wanted distraction. But Kalkreuth, a notoriously foolish old soldier, and the other Prussian negotiators, seized the idea on the wing. What dark and unavowable expectations they formed in scheming this meeting of the 'fairy enchantress' and the victorious soldier, no one will ever know, but their attitude is less surprising than Frederick William's. In sending on Kalkreuth's request to the Queen he added simply: 'The affair will certainly be unpleasant for you.'

Louise, who was then at Memel, did not hesitate an instant. 'I will drain the cup,' she said proudly, 'with the dignity befitting a Queen of Prussia.'

To realize what it cost her, we have to remember that she quite sincerely saw Napoleon as a 'Scourge of God', and that she had feared even for her husband, 'the profanation of contact with this infamous being'. We have to remember, too, that Napoleon had wounded her womanly honour by a whole series of attacks in the Bulletins of the Grand Army and the *Moniteur*. He had compared her to Helen of Troy who brought misery on her people, to Tasso's Armida burning her palace, and — far more insultingly — to Lady Hamilton, the English adventuress who was the *tendre amie* of Nelson and of the Queen of Naples. . . .

The details of the celebrated interview are well known. The Emperor arrived at the King's humble quarters on horseback, and climbed the narrow staircase to meet his fair victim *tête à tête*. 'I received him with Countess Tautenzien at the foot of the stairs,' wrote Countess von Voss, Grand Mistress of the Court, in her journal. 'He is ugly, fat-faced, brown, short and shapeless, with rolling eyes and an air of anger incarnate, a good mouth and teeth, very polished. He spoke for a long time alone with the Queen.' King Frederick William had discreetly vanished.

It is well known, too, that all the reproaches of the queen were useless. In vain she poured into Napoleon's ears rather puerile arguments with which the Minister Hardenberg had fed her. In vain she tried from time to time to give the scene a touching and pathetic character. 'It might have been Mlle. Duchesnois in tragedy,' sneered the Emperor later. 'The Queen of Prussia,' he wrote to Josephine, 'is truly charming. She is full of coquetry towards me. But don't be jealous, I am a waxed cloth and all that glides off me. It would cost me far too much to play the lover.'¹ He did, however, give the queen some vague promises which made the king think that the cause was won. All the greater was her disappointment when she was undeceived.

The very day after this first meeting Napoleon declared to Count Goltz, 'I know your king by heart now. This man has vowed me eternal hatred, and I will not be duped by a policy like yours. You have behaved like a stupid flirt who wants to deceive everyone and then finds herself the victim of her own treacheries. The queen has never been my friend, but I readily forgive her. She has been punished for her impetuosity, but after all she has shown character under misfortunes. She has spoken to me about her situation and her interests without derogating from her dignity. If vengeance dictates to me the destruction of Prussia as a great power, I shall know how to preserve my interests.' And with that, all that was left for Goltz to do was to sign the treaty. (July 9th, 1807.)

The queen accepted the repulse with sorrowing resignation. But the wound was incurable, and she died of it a few years later,² repeating Christ's words, 'My Kingdom is not of this world.'

For the present, however, she was still concerned with

¹ *Correspondance de Napoléon*, 12.875.

² July 19th, 1810. — TRANSLATOR

the saving of her husband's kingdom. In spite of every reverse, she was determined to continue the struggle and to prepare a better future. 'I do not believe,' she wrote, 'that Napoleon is seated firmly on his throne, brilliant as his present situation may be. Only truth and justice ensure stability and calm. Napoleon does not act according to the eternal laws but according to circumstances. He knows no moderation, and that is why he is in danger of losing his balance and falling. It would be blasphemy to say that God is with Napoleon, but, undeniably, he too is an instrument in the hands of the Almighty for the burying of ancient institutions that are rooted but obsolete.'

From that moment, then, Queen Louise's work was to be the renovation of Prussia. And to whom would fall the actual carrying out of so immense a task? She could scarcely count on her husband. 'He is in a state of lassitude and depression, of weakness, indifference and mistrust of himself. . . . He makes mistakes when a little tact and a little less obstinacy would obtain everything.' She had reposed great hopes in Hardenberg — the subtle and discreet diplomat of broad views and fine presence, the 'preux chevalier' who from April 1807 had become the King's most influential adviser — but Napoleon had exacted his dismissal, refusing to negotiate with 'this Hanoverian, brought up in the circle of the Prince of Wales and wholly English in his sympathies'.

Thus the royal couple found themselves almost completely isolated, abandoned by their allies, their friends and almost all their servants. And it was then that Queen Louise, the German woman of indomitable heart, thought of one who incarnated in himself the highest virtues and noblest aspirations of the German man. The heroic remedy was — Stein.

Dismissed, disgraced, cast down by misfortune and sickness, Stein had prolonged his stay at Königsberg for some

weeks after the departure of the court for Memel. When, after the battle of Eylau, communication with the interior of Germany was restored, he quitted East Prussia and, after traversing, not without danger, the district in which Schill's irregulars were stubbornly fighting the French garrison at Stettin, reached Berlin. His stay in the capital was brief; like a wounded lion he hastily made for his hereditary lands in Nassau, there to meditate in rural calm upon his past and future.

But his passage through Berlin had not gone unnoticed, and he had met there General Clarke, commanding the French troops. Under date March 4th, 1807, Clarke reported to the Emperor on his conversation with the disgraced minister: 'M. de Stein has certainly an interest in standing well with the French. His estates are in the neighbourhood of Frankfurt-on-Main and they are extensive,' declared Clarke with some naïveté. In fact the General's private correspondence, preserved in the archives of the Ministry of War at Paris, shows that he believed Stein to be one 'on whom the Emperor could count', as he was 'completely embroiled with the King of Prussia, whose ineptitude he had shown up rather too forcibly'. Clarke saw in him merit, intellect and great knowledge of finance, his only fault being impetuosity, and 'under a firm hand, such as that of the King of Westphalia' (!), 'he would give entire satisfaction'.

This meeting of Stein and Clarke was to have incalculable consequences. For the first time, the baron's name came to the Emperor's notice and it engraved itself in the prodigious memory. When, a little later, during the Tilsit meetings, the King of Prussia mentioned to him the difficulty of replacing Hardenberg, Stein's name occurred to him along with two others, better known in France, the diplomats Schulenburg and Zastrow, and he suggested these three candidates to the king. 'Take Baron Stein, he

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is a man of intellect.’¹ Strange irony of destiny — Napoleon himself taking the first step towards bringing back to power the man who was to be his most tenacious opponent!

Of himself, King Frederick William would doubtless never have consented to sacrifice his *amour propre* and reconcile himself with the rebellious minister. But Napoleon’s proposal was supported by Hardenberg and also by Queen Louise. The former has recorded in his journal the conversations that he had with the King on the subject before departing for Riga and exile, and though there are no corresponding documents from the Queen’s hand as to her share in it, we cannot doubt that at this moment it was she that played the decisive part, and that all the influence she possessed over the heart and mind of her husband was used to bring together again the two men on whom the salvation of Prussia depended.

The Queen had had little contact with Stein during his first ministry. But in her entourage there was a woman who was in a better position than any one to inform her as to the extraordinary personality of the Rhenish baron — the same Frau von Berg with whom he had regularly corresponded for years. The Queen was very fond of her, and the opinions of a woman who was a friend of Herder and Goethe had weight. And her praises of Stein were echoed by the young Princesses of Prussia, who were his consistent admirers.² In her hour of trial the Queen must often have thought of him, and it is not to be doubted that she talked about him at length to her husband — at any rate this is the

¹ ‘Napoleon recommended Stein, whom he regarded as a sound German, and a hardworking and disciplined employee, of the same sort as the Molliens, Gaudins and Darus in France, who would manage economically and get the taxes in.’ — Sorel.

² Clérambault, Consul-General of France at Königsberg, asserted later (dispatch of May 30th, 1809) that it was Princess Radziwill, Prince Louis Ferdinand’s sister, who had acquired influence over the Queen’s mind and used it in favour of Stein, ‘with whom she had lived for a long time’. There is no confirmation whatsoever of this story, which is in entire contradiction with all that we know of the baron’s virtuous life. It is probably a piece of mere court gossip.

It was not thus that Stein saw matters. He put himself at the King's entire disposition but, taught by experience, he required guarantees. A *conditio sine qua non* was the retirement of his old adversary the Cabinet Minister Beyme, who still formed part of the royal entourage. Incredible as it may seem, this demand, justified as it was, appeared unacceptable to the King, who clung to such last vestiges of the old regime that had received its death-blow at Jena. Everything threatened to go wrong again — but once more the Queen saved the situation. She thought of a compromise; Beyme (who as a matter of fact wanted nothing better than to retire) should continue with the King, but without specific duties and only till the return of the court to Berlin, after which he would become President of the Judicial Chamber. There exists a despairing letter written in the Queen's own hand: 'I implore you, be patient for the first months. The King will keep his word. Beyme will go, but only at Berlin. Give way thus far! In the name of Heaven, don't let everything be ruined for a matter of three months. I beg you, in the name of King and Country, in the name of my children and myself. Louise.'

On October 4th, 1807, Stein was once more appointed Minister, and armed this time with dictatorial powers. The whole administrative direction was in his hands — finance, police, the provincial ministry of Prussia. He was invested with the presidency of the Conferences of the Foreign Ministry, Count Goltz remaining Minister. He was made President, also, of the Commission for the execution of the Peace Treaty (which sat in Berlin) and of the 'Immediate Commission' recently formed at Memel for the dispatch of current business. Lastly, he was called upon to participate in the deliberations of the Army Reform Commission.

From that day a new era set in for Prussia and for Germany — the period of restoration and regeneration. The

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event was hailed by the patriot circles with unanimous enthusiasm. The eminent politician Gentz, who was a native of Prussia before he passed into the service of Austria, wrote shortly afterwards, 'Freiherr vom Stein is Germany's greatest statesman.' 'In the marsh in which we were struggling,' declared Altenstein, 'we needed a point of support, a solid pillar — Stein will be that pillar.' His abnegation and readiness to forget past injuries were praised by all. 'You have offered the unhappy country and its still more unhappy sovereigns a sacrifice unparalleled in modern history,' wrote one. He was likened to the Carthaginian Hannibal and the Athenian Phocion.

A veritable Stein legend was springing up. His very name seemed predestined. 'Stein' in German stands for stone, for rock; the bearer of that name was to be the rock on which the future grandeur of the Fatherland was to be built. He was to be 'Der Guten Grundstein, der Bösen Eckstein, der Deutschen Edelstein' — the foundation-stone of the good, the stone of stumbling for the bad, the precious stone of the German. And in an outburst that verged on blasphemy, Niebuhr saluted the future builder of the national temple of German glory in the words of the Lord 'Tu es Petrus'.

Queen Louise's work was done. Stein's was beginning.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REFORMER

ON October 4th, 1807, Stein took up the reins. Five days later he submitted for the King's signature the famous Edict of Emancipation, which had been rightly called the Prussian Magna Charta — a brilliant beginning to the reforming activity of his great fourteen months' ministry.

The abolition of serfdom had occupied the attention of the best minds in Prussia for more than half a century. In 1763 the great Frederick, in one of his not unusual moments of uplift, had given the order to 'abolish at once, absolutely and without discussion', the hereditary subjection of the Pomeranian peasants, but the order had remained a dead letter. Since the accession of Frederick William III the problem had come on to the agenda afresh. Crown-land peasants of Westphalia had been liberated — Stein himself, as we have seen, taking an active part in this local reform — and the 'Immediate Commission' set up by Hardenberg at the beginning of 1807 devoted long months to studying a new law extending the blessings of freedom to other provinces and other categories of peasants. But it had arrived at nothing conclusive.

It took Stein just five days to make an end of these hesitations, to overcome resistances and to obtain the definitive signature of the King to a legislative measure which overturned the ancient social system of Prussia from top to bottom.

It needed uncommon courage to attack such a task in the tragic circumstances in which the House of Hohenzollern found itself at that moment. On the morrow of Tilsit, the effective power of Frederick William III covered 620

square miles and a population of 730,000 souls. All the rest of the kingdom was occupied by the troops of the emperor and administered by the French authorities.

Certainly, the situation of the kingdom was desperate enough to invite the boldest measures — since there was no more to lose, every risk could be taken. But, even so, it required unlimited confidence and unshakable faith in the future of the German nation, not to recoil before the magnitude of the task to be accomplished.

The atmosphere of Königsberg (whither the Government was to be moved and where the new laws were to be worked out) was particularly favourable for the activities of the reformers. At that time it was, with Danzig, the chief exporting centre of East Prussia. The fresh breezes of the sea blew there. The free-trade idea of Adam Smith had gained numerous disciples, not only in the university circles inspired by the eminent economist Krauss, but also amongst the representatives of the landed proprietors — for these squireens, ultra-conservative though they were, needed no persuasion to support anything that facilitated the disposal of their produce. Kant, too, had taught there, opening a new era in the development of human thought, and his critical, rationalist teaching had exercised very considerable influence. The number of high officials that had followed the Court in its flight was not great, but they were the very pick of the Prussian bureaucracy. And, lastly, the King was too dejected by now to offer the smallest resistance to the ardour of the reformers, and Stein had become (for the moment at any rate) 'his oracle'. The Queen, for her part, saw in him the 'Grand Master who could and should vitalize everything', the hope of the nation.

Stein could therefore approach his work in a favourable setting. His reform programme was, as a matter of fact, ready, having been matured during the youthful years in Westphalia and completed from the experience of his first

ministry in Berlin. He had put it into precise form in a very curious memorandum, prepared at Princess Radziwill's request, in his Nassau retreat. In it the fundamentals of his whole work are set forth concisely.

The reformer wished to 'utilize the forces that are slumbering or ill-directed, to bring the spirit of the nation, with its views and its needs, on the one hand, and the spirit of the officials charged with administering general interests on the other, into accord'. He wanted 'to re-awaken collective spirit, civic sense, devotion to the country, the feeling of national honour and independence, so that a vivifying and creative spirit would replace the petty formalism of a mechanical apparatus'.

Exactly the same sentiments were expressed in a letter to Hardenberg at the same period. 'We must destroy this spirit of avid rapacity, this narrow attachment to the machine, which is the distinctive characteristic of the bureaucracy. The nation must become accustomed to manage its own affairs; we must get out of the state in which it is kept by an administration that is at once servile and fussy.' This was the ruling idea with which he started to plan the complete recasting of the social and administrative system.

How did he set about it? In what precisely consisted his legislative work, and what was its range? A biography of Stein would be incomplete unless it provided a detailed answer to these questions. We are obliged, therefore, to recapitulate in their main lines the agrarian, the administrative and municipal, and the military reforms effected under his ministry.

Emancipation of the Serfs and Agrarian Reform

The celebrated edict of November 9th, 1808, 'On the facilities for the possession and free use of landed property

and the personal relations of the inhabitants of the country', is, for all its complicated title, an extremely brief document; apart from the turgid preamble, it only consists of a dozen paragraphs.

The declaration contained in paragraphs 11 and 12 runs as follows: 'On publication of the present Order, the existing conditions of serfdom in hereditary tenures of all sorts will cease to exist. From St. Martin's Day 1810, all serfdom in Our States will cease to exist. From that date there will only be free men therein.'

But the legislator did not confine himself to removing the bonds of the human beings. He removed at the same time all the obstacles that had hitherto in Prussia prevented the free exchange of lands and the free choice of professions. The nobles' privilege of possessing what were called 'seigniorial' lands was abolished. Henceforth a noble could engage in the bourgeois arts, trades and professions without impairing his status. Henceforth peasants could pass into the bourgeois class, and vice versa, as the individual thought fit. And thus the regime of castes which existed in Prussia was abolished by one stroke of the pen.

The nobility, affected in its most precious privileges, was under no delusions as to the immense significance of the new law. 'Stein had brought revolution into the country', exclaimed von der Marwitz, and at the 'Casino', the famous aristocratic club of Berlin, young bloods declared that 'they would sooner have lost four battles of Jena'. There was cause indeed for the indignation of feudal Prussia! Obligatory domestic service, which bound the peasants' children to work in the lord's establishment, was abolished. No more fees from the peasant for permission to leave his bit of land, his 'holding'; no more tax on marriage; the lord's approval no longer necessary for the choice of an heir. Incredible as it seemed, the Prussian peasant was now a citizen like anyone else, in full possession of his liberty.

But what would he do with this newly acquired freedom? Would he not desert the countryside, the better to free himself from his former master? Would he not set up in some town as an artisan or small shopkeeper? Legally there was nothing to prevent it, but practically it could not happen in a country of primitive economic organization and insufficient communications, devastated and ruined moreover by the war, and where after all every one had his allotted place in society. Theoretically, the idea of moving into the town would have a certain attraction for a man who had been employed by the noble landowner as domestic or agricultural labourer. Yet even in this category cases of emigration were rare; most of these men remained with their old masters as salaried freemen.

As regards the much larger tenant and farmer class, obviously these had neither the power nor the wish to leave the bit of land on which they had been born. To make effective use of the newly conferred liberty, they would have had to become freeholders as well.

The question was easy enough to solve in all cases when the seigniorial rights were held by the State itself; all that was required was to give the former Crown-land serfs a property right in their holdings. A special Order, promulgated by Stein on July 27th, 1808, conferred on these peasants — to the number of 47,000 families — the most precious of gifts, the full possession of their land.

But these fortunate ones were only a very small fraction of the whole. For the rest of the rural population of Prussia — those who had been the serfs of private individuals — the Edict of Emancipation created an economic situation that was not without its dangers. The peasant possessed no more hereditary right over his holding than he had had before, for it remained organically a part of the seigniorial estate. In the capacity of tenant, he still remained subject to various dues in money and work. Emancipation even

created new risks for him. Formerly the proprietor had been forbidden to reduce the number of small holdings and increase his own domain at their expense. But as soon as free trade in land was proclaimed, it became exceedingly difficult for the State to prevent the nobility, ruined as it was by the war, from further encroachments on their tenants.

Was agrarian reform, then, to work out in practice in the aggrandisement of noble estates? Stein refused to admit it. 'Only one legal limitation on the free conveyance of land must remain, that which restrains the avarice of the rich and prevents the absorption of the land by the seigniorial domain,' he declared in the most unqualified way. He could not, indeed, without doing violence to the spirit and text of the edict, put an absolute ban on all such absorptions, but he could subject them to restrictions and to the supervision of governmental organs. The Instructions of February 14th, 1808, which regulated the question for the Prussian provinces, permitted the eviction of tenants only in cases where the tenures had been set up in the second half of the eighteenth century. In those of older tenures, which were by far the most numerous, the proprietor could only attach them to his domain on condition of constituting an independent and complete property of equal extent to that annexed.

But there remained the other danger, the hold of the big proprietor on those peasants who continued as his tenants. This obstacle Stein's energy was powerless to remove, and the crushing burden imposed on the peasantry, both in dues and in *corvées* on the lord's land, was retained. Later, in 1811, Hardenberg made a timid attempt to transform the Prussian into a freeholder; he was given entire disposal of his holding against the surrender of part of it to the lord. But the only result of this was to create a rural proletariat, and the resistance of the Prussian nobility was not broken until the Revolution of 1848.

A whole series of seigniorial rights, such as manorial justice and the right to hunt over peasant lands, survived to that date. Land-tax was not imposed on seigniorial lands till 1861. Police continued to be manorial till 1878,¹ and the lord's advowson of the local parish church has survived to our own days.

None of this was in Stein's intentions; he never supposed for an instant that manorial justice and police would not disappear with the abolition of serfdom. But to replace them by a governmental system of justice and police would have required the immediate organization of local courts and the creation of a rural gendarmerie out of nothing, which was almost impossible for a mutilated and devastated country that was in the occupation of hostile troops. On this difficulty, aggravated as it was by the desperate resistance of the nobles, the ardour of the great reformer was shattered.

All things considered, then, what exactly was the value of Stein's achievement in the Edict of Emancipation? Many have found it attractive to measure this by comparison with the agrarian legislation of the French Constitutional Assembly. But the comparison is very dangerous — the starting-points and the methods employed were absolutely different in the two cases. First of all, the French peasant, *l'homme franc*, was not a serf but a freeman. Further, the famous decisions taken by the Constitutional on the night of August 4th abolished the privileges of the nobility, lock, stock and barrel, and liberated the peasant from *all* the feudal burdens that weighed on his person and his property — personal servitude, mortmain both personal and real, manorial jurisdiction, etc. This historic night inaugurated the series of immense changes in the agrarian constitution of France which was accomplished during the Revolutionary period. The secularization of Church lands

¹ As late as 1851 we find Bismarck stoutly defending this institution.

and the confiscation of the property of the *émigrés* provided a huge reservoir of land which made possible the creation of the small freeholder class — the backbone of France.

There was nothing of this sort in Prussia. No one dreamed of revolution, abolition of nobility, breakdown of big estates. It had been hoped, indeed, to put an end to manorial jurisdiction and police, but, as we have seen, the attempt failed, and it took another half-century to bring this about. It had been hoped, too, gradually to transform the tenantry into independent small freeholders, but this transformation is incomplete to this day, more than a hundred years later.

But Stein and his collaborators must not be blamed for this. It must always be remembered that at the outset of the nineteenth century Prussia was a country of recent colonization, limited resources and sparse population. Its economic structure cannot be compared with that of France, Britain, Holland or even Western Germany (Westphalia, Bavaria, Württemberg), where a numerous class of free yeomen had existed from time immemorial. It does not greatly signify whether the small cultivator preceded or followed the feudal baron in the colonization of the Prussian lands. In this frontier country, only just opened up to civilization, the protection of the powerful was indispensable to him, and the price he had to pay for it was his independence. Moreover, the shortage of labour obliged the lord to attach the peasant to his glebe, and his opposition to complete liberation is comprehensible even if not excusable. A whole century after the edict this shortage of labour was still felt; in the years preceding the Great War, the working of the great agricultural domains of Prussia required the importation of seasonal labour which poured in by the hundred thousand from Poland and Bohemia.

And yet, a doubt lingers. . . . Was not Russia, which liberated her serfs in 1861, also a country of very sparse

population and very backward social structure, and did not Alexander II, in liberating them, put land at their disposal by scores of millions of acres? Stein's German apologists would find this comparison difficult to explain away; they might perhaps adduce the economic changes that took place between 1808 and 1861 — the rise of industry and above all the coming of railways, which facilitated the movement of agricultural labourers. But the fact remains that, except for Hungary, Prussia is the only country of modern Europe where large-scale landowning of the feudal type still exists.¹

But these points of criticism must not prevent us from recognizing that the actual effect of Stein's agrarian reforms was immense. Though the tardy promulgation of the law and its clumsy application by the local authorities led to disturbances in certain provinces — especially in Silesia, where they were only suppressed with the assistance of French troops — the great majority of the population hailed the Edict of Emancipation with real enthusiasm. Stein's purpose was to restore its morale, to evoke new forces, to awaken the hope of better times — and this object was achieved in full. 'All else that I have done in my life does not compare with my contribution to the work of emancipation,' exclaimed Schön, one of the minister's faithful collaborators. 'A new generation is born,' wrote Stägemann, an official told off to carry out the re-settlement of the manorial peasants, 'a generation that will send its children to the country's service instead of to the cemetery; a generation no longer bowed to the ground by material and spiritual poverty. It will form a people armed with strength and will, a people that will wipe out the country's shame and re-establish the glory of its honoured name.'

¹ In a speech delivered on May 10th, 1934, Herr Darré, Minister of Agriculture of the Third Reich, stated that during the nineteenth century the large landowners east of the Elbe had acquired 800,000 hectares (2,000,000 acres) representing more than 50,000 free peasant farms.

Administrative Reform

From the purely ideological viewpoint, the interest presented by a reorganization of administrative institutions may seem at first sight to be small. But sometimes reforms of this sort have an immense practical effect. Godefroy de Cavaignac, whose well-documented work on the formation of contemporary Prussia has created a following in France, is entirely mistaken in asserting that 'forms are of little importance in an Absolute Monarchy, where there is no guarantee that they will be maintained'. This may perhaps be true of a despotic regime of the Oriental type, in which a change of system is effected by cutting off the Vizier's head. But the enlightened absolutism that prevailed in Prussia at the opening of the nineteenth century was held fast in the cogs of the administrative machine and the bureaucratic tradition to an extent that is almost inconceivable to our own ways of thinking. The only parallel within our experience would be Russia in the last period of the Tsarist regime; there, every change made in the Governmental machine, the creation of a new ministry, a new organ of local administration or police, acquired an importance of which peoples accustomed to govern themselves have no notion.

In all times the German, especially the Prussian, has liked to be governed, and never has he felt the need of good government more imperiously than at the moment when, following the collapse of Jena and the shame of Tilsit, Stein inaugurated the reform era. Stein well knew it; three-quarters of his Nassau programme concerned the recasting of the administrative machinery.

Still taught by defeat and dismemberment, Prussia had lacked not only a sound army but also, and even more, an efficient administration provided with responsible organs and in a position to exercise its authority. What had to be

done now, therefore, was to create a new machine more fitted to the needs of the times. Immediately he was put in power, he set to work. Great legislative projects were put in hand, and these in their definitive form were approved by the King on November 24th, 1808 — on the eve of Stein's resignation — and, with some final modifications, put into force on December 16th of the same year.

First of all, the irresponsible institution of the 'King's Cabinet' disappeared for ever. But is it correct to say 'for ever'? Did we not, before and during the Great War, hear a good deal of William II's *chefs de cabinet*, civil, military and naval, who interfered at every moment with the activities of his ministers and generals? The Hohenzollerns seem to have clung with special tenacity to this particular institution of the old regime, even after it had lost all constitutional foundation — for from Stein onwards, constitutional responsibility for all governmental measures has resided in the ministers alone.

According to Stein's ideas, the activities of these high managers were to be presided over by a Prime Minister, and this post he assumed himself. 'It is necessary that the reorganization of the structure of government be entrusted to one man,' he wrote at the time. Once the reforms should have been effected, he envisaged the creation of a Council of State, still presided over by the Prime Minister, but including not only the ministers serving at the time, but also the ex-ministers and the heads of departments. This last project was never carried out.

In order to bring about a rational distribution of ministerial duties, he suppressed the provincial ministries, which had been one of the plagues of the old bureaucracy. It will be recalled that in 1806 he had advocated the reduction of the number of ministers to five, as in France (Foreign, War, Justice, Interior and Finance). He adhered to this idea, with the modification, however, that during

his own mandate, the Interior and Finance Ministries were combined under his personal direction. He devoted particular attention to the internal organization of the War Ministry, following, here also, the French model. This was a great innovation in Prussia; for hitherto no institution dealing with all army affairs under one head had existed, and the interference of the King's Cabinet had nowhere been so potent as in this field. Now, the activities of the Minister of War were to cover the whole administration of the army; only military operations in the strict sense were kept outside his jurisdiction and assigned to a Commander-in-Chief and his staff.

The same talent and initiative was effectively brought to bear on the organization of the combined Ministries of the Interior and Finance. That of the Interior comprised six departments — police, commerce, religion, general legislation, health and mines. At the head of each of these Stein placed a director with very extended powers, and these directors took part in the sittings of the 'General Directorate', which was not the old organ of that name, but a sort of Council of Ministers personally set up by Stein in anticipation of the future Council of State. These governmental directors of Stein's were the precursors of the Under Secretaries of State with whose aid the Iron Chancellor Bismarck was later to govern Germany.

Stein's model, we have remarked, was the French, but it was not only in details such as the above that his organization differed from that of the French law 'providing for the organization of the Ministry' of April 27th — May 25th, 1790. For that law, while maintaining the principle of monarchy, was in fact intended to destroy the royal power in practice, the ministers becoming organs of the Constitution instead of as formerly organs of the Crown. In Prussia it was the exact opposite. Stein's legislation, far from encroaching on the integrity of the royal power, simply

placed an improved and modernized organization at its disposal.

After the central institutions it was the turn of the provincial administrations. Hitherto, the Prussian provinces had been governed by 'Chambers', ancient organs of ill-defined powers, in which administrative and judicial functions were combined and confused, the collegiate form only aggravating the vices of the bureaucratic system.

Stein was familiar enough with these defects — had he not himself been First President of the Westphalian Chamber before he was transferred to Berlin? Better than anyone he knew what radical innovations were required in this field, and his duty was clearly marked out. After long preliminary study, the definitive scheme for the reorganization of provincial administration was settled in November, 1808. It was given the royal approval some weeks later, when Stein had already resigned, but the Order of December 26th is from end to end his personal work.

First of all, it effected a complete separation between the administrative and the judicial functions, the latter being henceforth exclusively the business of district tribunals which were now established for the first time. The administration proper was entrusted in each district to a single official bearing the title of Government President (*Regierungspräsident*), whose duties closely resembled those of a French prefect. But here, too, the Prussian legislation presented some very interesting peculiarities. It placed at the service of the Government Presidents a whole bureaucratic machinery that was absolutely lacking in France. The President was assisted by a certain number of responsible functionaries bearing the title of Government Councillor (*Regierungsrat*), directly under his authority and specialized each in a particular branch — police, religion, economic questions and so on. It is owing to this perfected mechanism that the Prussian prefect has been able to

exercise on the social and economic life of Prussia, and eventually of all Germany, a far wider and more effective influence than the provincial administration in modern France. Stein even contemplated the possibility of adding to these official councillors other councillors, chosen from among the notables, to represent the interests of the population, but this measure proved impracticable and was dropped.

Another special feature of the reform of 1808, on the contrary, has survived to our own day, the institution of Superior Presidents (Oberpräsidenten), having each under them a number of these District Presidents or prefects, and centralizing in their hands all questions affecting provinces as a whole. Further, the territory placed under the authority of a Superior President corresponded exactly with an army corps region. Thus Stein — harmoniously combining his innovations with the venerable traditions of the past — maintained, both for civil and military purposes, the ancient provincial framework, whereas Revolutionary France on the contrary, annihilated it by abolishing the functions of the intendants-general and dividing up the country into artificially delimited departments.

These organic reforms were rounded off by a whole series of administrative measures intended to reduce the number of unnecessary officials and to obtain the maximum work from the rest.

On Stein's administrative reform history's judgment is unhesitating. If Prussia (and in due course Germany also) possessed throughout the nineteenth century the most perfect bureaucratic machine in Europe, it is Stein she had to thank for it.

Municipal Reform

Prussia, then, would henceforth possess an enfranchised rural population and an administrative structure suited to

the necessities of the time. But something else was needed if she were to approximate to the modern type of State — the collaboration of all kinds of citizens in the nation's work. And the Royal Order of November 19th, 1808, concerning the reform of municipal institutions was, in Stein's mind, the prelude to a solution of this grand problem of popular representation. X

We have seen that, before Jena, the administration of the towns was still entrusted to minor functionaries nominated by the Government as a reward for past services (generally in the army) and quite unfit for serious work. The very memory of ancient communal liberties seemed to have vanished. But it was living enough for a Reichsfreiherr, and it was this, quite as much as the example of the French Revolution, that inspired him when he summoned the populations of the towns to manage their own affairs.

The Order of November 19th instituted elective municipal councils in all Prussian towns. X The right to vote was given to all citizens of respectable life and morals possessed of an annual income of 150-200 thalers or of a capital of any sort. According to the importance of the town, the number of its councillors ranged from 24 to 100. The municipal council in its turn elected its executive organs, the magistrates and, over them, the burgomaster. X The 'municipality', that is the municipal council and the magistrates together, were invested with the right to frame their own budget, to impose taxes, to contract loans, to alienate communal property — and all this of its own authority. What Stein instituted was, in fact, an almost complete communal autonomy. X In the sequel a number of restrictions were imposed on this regime of liberty. The municipal courts were suppressed to make room for the State tribunals — as was perfectly logical — and the municipalities were deprived of such functions as related to the maintenance of public order; in the small towns, indeed,

the elected magistrates continued to control the police, but they did so by delegation from the State. Later, the property qualification for the vote was also raised, and State control was re-established over the fiscal legislation of the towns and the management of communal property. But these things were, in sum, mere retouchings, modifications in a first draft that was necessarily imperfect. The great fundamental lines of the reforms were maintained, and Prussia was thenceforth equipped with an elective municipal organization.

Here as in so many other connections, Stein and his collaborators had before them the example of the French Revolution. They drew upon the text of the law 'on Elections and on Governmental Administrations' of December 22nd, 1789 — January 8th, 1790. They adopted unchanged the provisions concerning the 'free mandate' of municipal councillors. They adopted also, integrally, Article VII of the French Municipal Law of December 4th—18th, 1789, instituting election by districts instead of by corporations. But here, too, it was only in details that Stein copied. The spirit that guided his urban legislation was in essence completely different. According to the ideas of the French legislators of 1789, the French communes were constituted as aggregates of individuals forming the primary political cells of a homogeneous nation. They viewed every manifestation of particularism, provincial or communal or corporative, with undisguised suspicion. For them 'bourgeois' and 'citadins' did not exist; Revolutionary France recognized only 'citizens'. Stein, as his recent biographer Ritter has conclusively shown, started from an entirely different conception. Faithful to the ancient German tradition, he intended that each urban community should form a particular corporation. Although deprived of the political independence that it had had in the Middle Ages, the town was to keep its legal personality, fixed by

local statute. With this underlying idea, the powers and organs of the municipality and the limits set to State interference materially differed from those which found favour in Revolutionary France.

Stein's municipal reforms were to bear fruit for a hundred years and more. In its main lines his system lasted till December 15th, 1933, when the National Socialist legislation introduced new methods, and it made possible the grandiose modern development of the German cities, with their splendid social, medical and educational institutions.

But in the reformer's mind this law regarding the municipalities was only to be the first storey of a vastly larger structure. His aim was nothing less than a new political order, and these municipal liberties were to serve as a school for citizens who 'would gradually become accustomed to act independently before being called upon to take part in the discussion of general questions in greater assemblies'. He envisaged the early coming of national representation, and was convinced that the German people was worthy of it. 'The history of all German republics and unions, in which I include also Switzerland and Holland,' he wrote, 'gives manifest proof of the fact that wherever the German is able to express his will freely and without hindrance, we see him discussing and solving the problems presented to him with calm, reflection, precision and understanding of collective interests.' 'Parliamentary forms seem to me adequate,' he declared on another occasion, 'to avert all risk of disorder and abuse in a calm and reasonable nation; in fact I think our placid German has more need of stimulants than of sedatives.'

Accordingly, the municipal reforms were to be followed by the creation of elective organs in the country as well, by provincial self-government, with a national Reichstag as the final goal.

Stein had given prolonged thought to the constitution of

such a parliament. His conceptions were a little confused perhaps, but they unquestionably bore the stamp of originality. He proposed the creation of two Chambers. One of these was to be representative of the interests of the higher nobility, after the fashion of the British House of Lords. Our Rhenish *grand seigneur* and mediatized baron of the Empire, it is curious to observe, had nothing but contempt for the small Prussian squire. 'The Prussian nobility is a burden on the nation,' he wrote, 'because it is too numerous, often too poor, and too greedy of place, salary and privilege. Its poverty results in a lack of education and an incapacity to fill the higher functions of State.' He saw no objection to abolishing the 'poor nobility' and limiting the privileges of birth to a certain number of great territorial families, and it was the heads of these families who were to sit in his Chamber of Peers.

Equally original were his ideas as to the constitution of the Lower Chamber. This was not to be an emanation of direct and universal suffrage, but representative of various corporative and local organizations. The great traditionalist was propounding ideas a hundred years ahead of his day.

✕ All this was destined to be no more than a sketch. Time, literally, was denied him for pushing on with them, and the opposition of the King and the conservative element did the rest. As soon as he tried to apply self-government to the countryside he met with insurmountable obstacles. ✕ The gaps and imperfections of the scheme were manifest at once. How could one hope to create an effective representation of communes or provinces in a country where the great majority of the peasants were not the owners of their land, where so many of the lord's ancient privileges were kept, and where morals, manners and customs were rooted in social inequality?

Later, Hardenberg attempted the task of constituting,

and did constitute, representative assemblies for the countryside, but the grip of the noble proprietors on these institutions was all-powerful, and only Bismarck's law of 1872 destroyed it. In sum, Prussia, like the rest of Germany, has never succeeded in creating organs of rural self-government that were at all comparable with the English County Councils or the Zemstvos of Tsarist Russia.

And so Stein's constitutional plans for the convocation of a Parliament were dropped as soon as he resigned, and his work was doomed to remain incomplete.

Army Reform

On the morrow of the disastrous campaign of 1806-7 the old Prussian army, the army of Frederick the Great, had ceased to exist, annihilated by defeat. The Prussian State was ruined, devastated, bowed under the conqueror's heel, and with the greater part of its territory in enemy occupation it was hopeless to think of any immediate rebuilding of its military power.

When Stein came into power, then, his field of activity, so far as military matters were concerned, was restricted by force of circumstances. His task was simple, to break resolutely with the past and to work out in silence the principles of a future military organization to be put into force when the time should come, basing it on the new methods of which the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars had demonstrated the efficacy.

The old Frederician generals whose incapacity had been proved in the last campaign, the starred and ribboned nonentities who constituted Frederick William's usual entourage, would be of little value to the Prime Minister as collaborators. He needed new men of bold ideas and wide-open minds. Such men were Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, the two great organizers of Prussia's *revanche*,

whom Stein found serving as members of the Military Reorganization Commission when he assumed its presidency.

Foreigners both — for Gneisenau was a Saxon and Scharnhorst a colonel from the Hanoverian service, in which humble birth had debarred him from obtaining a regiment — they had attached themselves to Prussia, as Stein himself had done, in the hope of finding a field of activity at once wider and more appropriate to their aspirations as German patriots. A complete understanding was soon established between the Prime Minister and the two soldiers. For Stein quickly appreciated Gneisenau's qualities of honesty, firmness and courage, and discerned in Scharnhorst, under his appearance of a tousled and carelessly-dressed 'philosopher', a real military chief, a manager of men and an organizing genius 'whose soul had as many folds as his face had wrinkles'.

The ideas of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, modern and audacious, met with obstinate resistance from other members of the Military Commission, and still more from the king's confidants. Stein therefore applied himself before all to overcome this resistance. 'Stein displays great energy,' writes Scharnhorst in February, 1808, 'in trying to put an end to the deplorable state of mind that still reigns in the military administration, and it is from him that I hope for changes in this situation; at present the King is deceived and no one will ever open his eyes.' Presently, however, Stein prevailed and Scharnhorst was made Aide-de-Camp General and Secretary of the Military Cabinet. The way to reform was now open, and the men chosen and backed by Stein could set to work.

The most urgent problem was to fill the gap that separated the army from the rest of the population. It was the close ties that united them to the nation as a whole that had given the Revolutionary and Napoleonic armies their

incomparable strength. Might not the same result be obtained on German soil, and the mercenary be transformed into a being who was admired and respected? 'I consider,' Stein had once said, 'that any man who is not a complete egoist ought, at any time in his life, to regard the condition of the soldier as the most honourable of all.'

The true, the radical, solution of this problem was obviously to institute obligatory military service for the whole nation. In their theories, the Prussian reformers went even further than the organizers of the French army whose example they were following. In France, by the law of 19 Fructidor An VI (September 5th, 1798), 'the defence of his country' was 'the duty of every citizen', but only 'when the country was declared in danger'. Apart from this emergency, the French army was recruited by voluntary enlistment and by the 'conscription', under which a conscript of means could free himself by finding a substitute.

In Prussia, even by 1807, it was contemplated that all the population ('Everyone who could . . . against a wall,' in Scharnhorst's crude phrase) should be put through an apprenticeship in arms. 'No one should be exempt; not to have served ought to be shameful,' Blücher had declared shortly after the conclusion of the Peace of Tilsit. Gneisenau would have introduced obligatory military exercises in the elementary schools 'so as to bring up a race comparable to the ancient Spartiates'.

The application of these bold principles was of course incompatible with long service — at that time, in Prussia as in most other countries, the soldier remained with the colours for twenty years. And herein lay the real originality of the new system advocated by the Königsberg reformers. Service obligatory for all, but limited in duration; a regular army of reduced strength, but an immense reserve army (Landwehr and Landsturm) consisting of men who had gone through a period of instruction with the colours —

such was the ingenious solution propounded by Scharnhorst and Gneisenau. All the world knows how it has been copied.

It goes without saying that at the moment it was absolutely premature to put into execution projects so vast. The principle was established, but its practical application was postponed, and obligatory service was only applied in Prussia in 1813-14, in the storms of the War of Liberation.

Compelled meanwhile to confine themselves to a more modest task, the Prussian leaders set about the formation of the cadres. First of all, the corps of officers had to be imbued with a new spirit that would fit them to become the educators of the nation. Inefficient officers were discharged in great numbers. The difficulties of the Treasury were made the pretext for reducing the number of regimental officers from 7121 to 1638, while, as for the generals, very nearly all of them were retired. The Order of August 3rd, 1808, abolished the rule which made the officer's epaulettes an exclusively noble privilege and instituted compulsory examinations, thus opening the military career to men of all classes who aspired to that honour, and had qualified for it in a course of instruction. Further promotion was to be by seniority up to the rank of captain, above that rank by selection according to capacity. Fixed rates of pay were at the same time allotted for officers of all grades, who had hitherto lived substantially on the profits that they could make on the management of their companies or regiments.

Equally radical changes were made in the condition of the soldier. Service having been proclaimed a national duty, the enlistment of foreign mercenaries was strictly forbidden. Degrading corporal punishments were abolished by the Order of August 2nd, 1808, as incompatible with the honour of a citizen. Stein, we may remark in passing, had some hesitation in agreeing to this last reform, asserting characteristically, that corporal punishment had been used

with success in the Middle Ages, even in the case of nobles and ecclesiastics.

Last and most important of all, the system of rapid recruit training followed by transfer to the reserve was instituted for the first time. It was only an experiment on a modest scale, but its effect on future events was incalculable. While retaining the twenty years' term (and the innumerable existing exemptions) the reformers reduced the serving strength of the company, the rest being successively called up from their homes for a month's training with the colours. (Royal Order of August 6th, 1808.)

Imperfect as it was, this, the famous *Krümper* system, was effective. Thanks to it, the number of men trained to arms was considerably increased, and when Napoleon, as we shall see presently, forced Prussia to reduce her army to 42,000 men, his control was evaded. The role that was to be played by these Krümper in the great national uprising of 1813 is familiar.

Thus, under Stein's auspices, the instrument of Prussia's *revanche* began to be forged.

Such, in its main outlines, was the work of reform. To comment upon it would seem superfluous. Its greatness is self-evident; it would be hard indeed to find another example in history of so vast an achievement by one man, in so short a time — no more than fourteen months. It is no matter for astonishment then, that German historians are lyrical in their praise of him, that they acclaim him as the initiator of a new era, the founder of modern Germany.

Stein's legislative work has been criticized, and with passion, even by some of his compatriots. One such criticism is that Frederick William's Prime Minister wears other people's laurels, and that all he did was to put his signature to other men's schemes. This particular criticism seems to us puerile. No one has ever claimed that Stein did,

or could do, without the help of distinguished collaborators in the preparation of his laws. On the contrary, his great merit consisted precisely in that he managed to surround himself with a group of specialists of extreme brilliance, disinterested, instructed and patriotic. They, too, have left names to posterity — Scharnhorst and Gneisenau for the army, Schrötter and Schön who took part in working out the Edict of Emancipation, Altenstein for the administrative reforms, and Frey, a strange figure, Director of Police at Königsberg, Freemason and Rationalist, who lodged the Dictator in his house and whose ideas greatly influenced the municipal reforms. Stein unified the efforts of all these men, breathed into them his ardour and his *élan*, assumed the final responsibility for their actions, broke down the resistance of the King and his reactionary entourage, and proportioned the parts in the work as a whole.

We shall, therefore, waste no time on personal questions of this sort. The only criticisms that we need to consider are those relating to the spirit and character of the Steinian reforms.

Stein has been reproached with having produced work that was incomplete and lacking in clearness and precision, and with not having given the Prussian people a sufficient impetus towards liberty and individuality of action. Up to a point, these criticisms are justified. But is not Godefroy de Cavaignac, their mouthpiece, himself the first to recognize that 'in the very fact of these inward self-contradictions Stein reproduces one of the characteristics of the German genius'? — that genius which is recalcitrant to form, to the clear and logical concept that tends to synthesize past and present and even sometimes to reconcile the irreconcilable.

Cavaignac, as we have already observed, errs in comparing the reforms of Stein with those effected in the French Revolution — an error, incidentally, which has

been made before him by certain German historians, who have sought to present the Steinian reforms in terms of their own democratic and radical prepossessions.

Nothing could be further from the facts than to assert that Stein purely and simply transplanted the legislation of Revolutionary France to the sandy soil of Prussia. Firmly attached to tradition, a lover of the German past, the Reichsfreiherr felt a profound aversion for the great French Revolution, to which indeed, according to his friend Varnhagen von Ense, he had 'vowed implacable hatred'. And if the slightest doubt subsisted on the point one need only read the 'Historical Sketch of the period 1789-1799', written by him for his daughter and discovered by E. von Meijer in the secret archives of Berlin.

Stein asserts in this that the Revolution was the consequence, not of the abuses of the *ancien régime* but of the weakness of those in power, the decline of the religious spirit and the jealousies of the estates. He attacks 'the spirit of the time', its revolutionary atheism, the abstractions of Rousseau, the principle of the Sovereignty of the People. The sources of the Revolution, he declared, are impure and its results detestable. The work of the Constituent Assembly he judges more than harshly: 'It has not only annihilated the whole ancient order of society, the old relations between Sovereign and people . . . it has also with an unpardonable levity destroyed the rights of the corporations and of property. It has set up a new system founded on the ill-digested opinions of the empty sophists of the century. . . . The spirit animating this constitution was not that of wisdom and experience, virtue and religion. It was a spirit of pretentious and empty innovation, a spirit of criminal and sacrilegious vengeance.'

Truly, a man whose convictions were as settled as this could not have found his inspiration in the example of the Revolution. If he profited by French experience, if he

drew — as he did to a large extent — on French legislation, it was because he could not do otherwise. By 1807, certain Revolutionary principles had, so to put it, passed out of copyright. 'The force of these principles is such,' wrote Hardenberg at this same period, 'and they are so generally recognized and widespread, that a State which refused to accept them will be condemned to submit to them or perish.' And, as Professor G. Lefebvre¹ judiciously observes, 'Even admitting that he himself had entirely escaped the direct influence of the French ideas, it is questionable whether the men of the milieu in which he lived were equally immune.'

The influence of the French Revolution on the Steinian reforms and the destinies of Prussia is not to be denied. 'But this influence worked in the opposite way from that supposed by Cavaignac,' says Jacques Bainville. To the profounder tendencies of the French revolutionaries, to the true essence of their legislation, Stein was, and remained, refractory.

The object in France was to establish the principles of political liberty and social equality, in Prussia to establish those of public authority and civic duty. In France the legislator sought to ensure the citizen's individual well-being, in Prussia to harness individual effort to the public well-being; in France to accomplish a philosophic and humanitarian task, in Prussia, quite simply, a national one.

¹ *Revue historique*, Vol. CLXXII, Sept.-Oct., 1933, p. 338.

CHAPTER IX

STEIN AND NAPOLEON

THE fourteen months during which Stein directed the destinies of Prussia coincided in date with the great epochal period of Napoleon's career between Tilsit and Erfurt, when he seemed to have reached the summit of all-powerfulness. Conqueror of Italy, victor over Austria, Prussia and Russia, this man, who said that he was 'of the best race of Caesars', was preparing to found, on the ruins of the ancient Germanic empire, a new Charlemagne empire, both wider and more unified than the old.

The Germans have always reproached, and still reproach,¹ the French with wanting to impose on the whole world an abstract political ideology, valid for all times and places, derived from logic, from pure reason, without regard to the subconscious elements that slumber in the soul of every people.

If ever this reproach was merited it was in the period of the First Empire. The French Revolution had proclaimed the annihilation of all the world's tyrants, the establishment of a world-wide republic and perpetual peace. 'In Europe,' cried the Abbé Grégoire from the tribune of the Convention, 'there shall be neither fortresses nor frontiers nor foreign peoples.' Bonaparte, as legitimate heir of the Revolution, had taken over these generous aspirations, which accorded so well with his lust of conquest and domination. He dreamed of constituting all Europe into 'one and the same body of nations'. 'Everyone, wherever he went, would always find himself within the common

¹ See for instance our contemporaries: E. R. Curtius, *Essai sur la France*, and Fr. Sieburg, *Dieu est-il Français?*

fatherland.' He would have 'brought into the European family community of codes, principles, opinions, sentiments, views and interests'.¹ 'We need,' he wrote one day to Fouché, 'a European Court of Appeal, a single currency, the same weights and measures, the same laws. I must make all the nations of Europe into one and the same people. This, Monsieur le Duc, is the only fulfilment that befits me.'²

If now and then he would disavow all intention of applying these vast projects to the practical world, if he could exclaim in a discussion with Caulaincourt³ that 'this universal empire is a dream and I am well awake' — the facts contradict him with one voice.

The dream was meant to become a practical reality — and, in fact, did not Napoleon actually succeed in imposing on Europe, for a number of years, the forms of French life and civilization, 'the same administrative status, the same political direction, and (in the form of the Continental Blockade) the same economic law'?⁴ And all this in total disregard of divergences of race and deep-rooted national peculiarities? 'I alone know the French, the needs of European peoples and society.'⁵

The idea of attachment to the soil did not exist for him. 'The fatherland is a place one lives in', was another of his remarks to Caulaincourt, 'one soon forgets that one's father or one's self was born under another sky.' The living incarnation of the Latin spirit, he displayed an entire incomprehension of the German and Slav mentalities. He meant to 'widen the morale . . . of these Germans, who are adhering to the same old ideas and still talk about the death of the Duc d'Enghien!' (Talleyrand). A mathematical genius, a manager of figures and masses, he 'saw nothing of man in depth'.⁶ He believed that everything could be

¹ Las Cases, *Mémorial*, LV, 153; III, 298.

² Fouché, *Mémoires*, II, 113.

³ Caulaincourt, *Mémoires*, II, 315.

⁴ Julien Benda, *Discours à la Nation Européenne*, p. 30.

⁵ Caulaincourt, *Mémoires*, II, 311.

⁶ André Suarès, *Napoléon*.

compensated for by material advantages, that everything could be bought, even the Pope and the Catholic Church. 'The Pope will lose nothing if the Pontifical See is transferred to Paris, because it will make him richer than he was before.'¹

From the heights to which an extraordinary destiny had elevated him, he no longer perceived the hatred and bitterness that was being aroused by a policy that, born of noble and generous ideas, was degenerating more and more into a brutal despotism.

About 1850 a survivor of the Napoleonic era, the Russian statesman Count Uvarov, gave in his memoirs of Stein a vivid picture of the state of mind in Europe during the Napoleonic domination. 'Those who have not lived in that feverish epoch, at the centre of this continuous sullen fermentation, will never have any exact idea how prodigiously abnormal was the state of people's feelings. . . . At the time of the Empire high society in Europe universally hated Napoleon, and in this crusade were included all the independent coteries and all notable people who were not in the immediate orbit of the great captain. This opinion did not need to be put in any party terms; it was an open conspiracy, if the word can be applied to the avowal of a common antipathy to a power that was crushing so many countries at once. . . . More than once Napoleon tried to break this conspiracy in his iron hand, but it was unseizable; it was everywhere and nowhere, it had no absolute centre, but only rallying-points.'²

'Baron Stein,' continues the Russian writer, 'was destined to become one of the most formidable pivots of this system, which was organized with such skill that it presented no definite shape, and swore obedience to no common password

¹ Caulaincourt, *Mémoires*, II, 370.

² Uvarov, *Stein et Pozzo di Borgo*.

except the overthrow of the imperial tyranny, the *delenda est Carthago*.'*

And in truth, Reichsfreiherr vom Stein occupied a unique position among the great Emperor's innumerable opponents. While the monarchs of Europe were defending the principle of legitimacy, to which the French Revolution had dealt an irreparable blow, while Great Britain was fighting to safeguard her economic interests, while Pozzo di Borgo was gratifying a personal hatred, Stein alone stood up as the champion of a living idea, the spokesman of nationality in its integrity. This idea of nationality, to which the Spaniards and Russians in their struggle with the Conqueror gave fire but not precise form, Stein condensed into a veritable political programme. 'Stein was the first statesman clearly to perceive this motive force of the nineteenth century, the urge to create national states,' says Treitschke. 'Stein was convinced that the hegemony of France was only possible through the weakness of Germany and Italy. According to him, the establishment of a new equilibrium of the great powers required absolutely that each of the two great peoples of Central Europe should constitute a powerful national state. . . . Two generations later, history was to justify the prophecy of genius.'

The gulf fixed between the philosophy of Napoleon and that of Stein was an abyss. The Rhenish lord, whose ancestors had from the top of their donjon dominated the fields around them for seven centuries, met the cosmopolitanism of Bonaparte with a boundless attachment to his race and to his native soil. 'I have only one country, Germany.' His Teutonic ponderousness, his rather pedantic gravity, contrast significantly with 'the vivacity, the power of feeling at home anywhere and everywhere' that distinguished Napoleon.¹

Imbued with this unshakable belief in the spirit of

¹ Emil Ludwig, *Napoleon*.

nationality, Stein could not admit, even in theory, the advantages of a unified Europe. His views on this fundamental question were expressed with unequivocal clearness. 'The admirers of Napoleon,' he writes, 'the friends of quiet and prosperity, hope that the Emperor will achieve his universal monarchy, and expect from this institution permanent peace and a splendid flowering of human forces. *But the state of calm is prejudicial to the evolution of the human race.* Men of eminence were never so rare in Greece as after the subjection of the country to Rome, and never have they been so lacking in all Europe as during the first three centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire. At that period the human powers were no longer vivified by the will to keep national honour and independence intact. The free play of forces was paralysed. And yet the despotism of the Roman state rested on less solid foundations and was less insistent on details than that of the French, under whom we lose the freedom of thought, action and word in order to keep the right to aspire to the freedom of the seas.'

Imbued, not less, with the traditionalist spirit, Stein sensed under the Imperial purple the man who was carrying on the abhorred work of the Jacobins. 'What is special to Napoleon,' he declared, 'is the complete disregard of the rights of property and of tradition.'¹ Passionately independent and wholly incapable of obsequiousness, he was profoundly shocked by the atmosphere of servility that the Emperor managed to create around him and, indeed, all over Europe. He saw in Napoleon 'a despot who makes himself a god and tramples humanity under foot'. He cannot conceive why 'the Emperor's faithfuls take such pride in their blind obedience'. Yet his friend, Count Bassewitz, a Mecklenburg Minister, had to submit to being told by a French general that 'Monsieur, the Emperor's will must be done. You see this tree: If the Emperor ordered me to

¹ Stein, *Staatswissenschaftliche Betrachtungen*.

hang you on it, hanged you would be, then and there.' And Stein had one day to hear these words from the lips of Daru: 'Consider the Emperor's will as Fate. It has to be submitted to.'

But submission to inexorable destiny was something to which Stein would never resign himself. And this is the keynote of his greatness, the outstanding trait of his nature that made him worthy of his Imperial opponent.

For in Stein, too, there was a quality that made him seem a 'giant among men', as the Genevese banker D'Ivernois, who knew him in 1812, said. All who came in frequent contact with him were subjected by his attractive and commanding personality. The man, there is no doubt, was even greater than the minister. Alexander von Humboldt truly observed that Stein was not a statesman in the proper sense of the word. Though he achieved great reforms, his political ideas were often wanting in precision, and he had nothing even of the tactician's cleverness, the chess-player's perspicacity or the diplomat's subtlety. But he possessed the supreme quality of indomitable courage and quite unshakable firmness. 'I only know of two persons who have no fear of anybody, General Blücher and the Minister Stein,' Scharnhorst remarked one day, and he, if anyone, was in a position to judge. Stein was as though hewn out of a block of granite, solidly homogeneous, always intransigent and insensible to finesses and nuances. And he looked it, with his 'square face, his broad forehead and aquiline nose, his penetrating eyes veiled by thick eyebrows, his unequal and slightly humped shoulders that seemed made for a cuirass', to quote Uvarov. It was the same with his manners, ceremonious and stately — he treated all alike, bowing only to superior intellect and independence of character. As one of his collaborators said, 'if he had occupied a throne, or officiated at an altar, he would always have been the same, always tending towards the same

object and acting on the same principles'. The same again with his conversation — on everyone who talked with him the impression he made was indelible. 'Vulgarity, weakness and egoism were silent when he began to discuss in his vigorous German with its old-fashioned vernacular forms, terse and cutting, so well adapted to his ruling passion. The vulgar trembled before his bludgeon blows and pitiless sarcasms' (Treitschke).

Varnhagen von Ense tells us that he expressed himself with great vivacity; at certain moments his voice and hands trembled and his words became scarcely audible. But a moment later he would fix his great piercing eyes on his interlocutor's, searching in them for the smallest indication of a veiled opposition, and then — would hurl himself afresh into a fierce attack. A conversation with him was a steady struggle — at every moment it was dangerous and, correspondingly, it had a peculiar charm. It was a mental excitement that one did not avoid, but courted.

His bursts of anger, his intolerance, and his cutting manner made him innumerable enemies, even in his own camp. He was called hard, rude, inconsiderate, and compared to the storm which no doubt clears the air but sometimes wrecks houses as well. Contemptuous of criticism, he went on his way, physically and morally the very picture of one of those German *Ritter* of the fourteenth century, rough warriors of ardent faith like the Franz von Sickingen and Götz von Berlichingen immortalized by Goethe.

Such was the man who brought to the 'secret alliance of European opinion against the Napoleonic regime' the support of his energy, will and intelligence. 'Everything he picked up *en route* in the way of methods and mechanisms,' says Uvarov again, 'he built without scruple into the system of which he had made himself the tireless champion: the indignation of thinking men, the enthusiasms of youth, the grief of mothers, the exaltation of women, the great gifts

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of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, the impetuosity of Prince Louis Ferdinand . . . all was grist to the mill, he used it all.'

But as Prime Minister of Prussia, Stein long hesitated to embark on such a struggle—in which there would be no quarter—and it was only gradually that he allowed himself to be drawn into it. He had always hated Napoleon, and he had been one of the instigators of the war of 1806. But at the close of 1807, at Memel, when Frederick William invested him with the supreme power, the situation was no longer the same. Prussia was out of action, and a respite was absolutely necessary.

It will be recalled that the greater part of the kingdom was occupied by the French troops. On July 12th, 1807, three days after the signature of the Treaty of Tilsit, Berthier Prince of Neuchâtel and Field-Marshal Kalkreuth had signed at Königsberg a Convention providing for the gradual withdrawal of the occupying troops by stages, but only 'provided that the levies made on the country had been met'. But as to the amount of these levies, not a word was said, and thus the Convention of July 12th became, with the Treaty of Tilsit, 'a masterpiece of destructive skill' which permitted Napoleon 'to prolong Prussia's agony and, by exacting exorbitant payments, to postpone the evacuation indefinitely'.¹ Meanwhile 150,000 men and 50,000 horses were maintained at Prussia's sole expense. An imperial decree signed at Berlin on November 3rd, 1806, had divided 'the States of the King of Prussia conquered by the army' into four departments, Berlin, Küstrin, Stettin and Magdeburg. France supervised the whole administration of the country, except that justice remained in the hands of Prussian courts. All officials took the oath to the Emperor, and the entire revenues of the occupied provinces went into the Imperial treasury.

The historian Bignon, who in 1806-7 was the immediate

¹ A. Vandal, *Napoléon et Alexandre Ier*, Vol. 1, p. 99.

assistant of Intendant-General Daru, estimates that the total of extraordinary contributions had reached 474 millions, and the value of deliveries in kind at 90 millions, even before the amount of Prussia's liabilities had been settled.¹ 'Never before,' he says, 'did a foreign occupation weigh so cruelly on a country. . . . War no longer supported war merely, but a year of peace as well. . . . Strangely enough, even consumption provided extra receipts. For instance, the parts of animals not used for feeding the troops — the skins, the fat, the horns — were sold off by the army commissaries, and the yield of these sales amounted to 805,504 francs. This will give some idea of the enormous quantities of animals consumed by the armies of occupation, for how many more that were consumed were never accounted for!'

Profound misery crushed the entire country. The price of corn had become exorbitant. Salt was doubled, coffee was replaced by chicory, and an 'Ersatz' had already been contrived for tobacco. In certain parts the population was threatened with actual famine, with only one head of cattle out of twenty and one horse out of fifty, left to it. The thousands of half-pay officers were allowed a ration of two pounds of bread a day lest they should die of hunger. The Prussian Minister in Paris told the Imperial Government that 'he could furnish a specific list of towns where two-thirds of the houses are standing empty and their owners wandering at large. And I could add to it a much longer list of villages that are entirely deserted. . . . In the city of Berlin itself, lately so flourishing, six hundred houses had already been abandoned'.

The French military authorities themselves were compelled to admit the lamentable state of the Prussian population. 'The misery is such that suicides in the middle classes have become appallingly frequent,' wrote Clarke to his

¹ Bignon, *Histoire de France sous Napoléon*, Vol. VII.

master. 'The mortality among the inhabitants in all these lands is frightful,' affirmed Rapp, adding the significant phrase, 'It is not for the Prussians to complain if we sometimes treat them with scant consideration; every day they bring it on themselves'. (September 17th, 1807.) The major commanding the French depot at Königsberg wrote at the same period that 'Heavy mortality both of men and of beasts, added to the dearth of food, has brought misery and desolation into every family. Complaint would be still more marked, if the exaltation of discontent were not checked and damped by the phlegm natural to aquatic (*sic*) countries.'

It is needless to multiply the evidences. The situation that presented itself to Stein in October 1807 was unrelievedly tragic.

But, far from allowing himself to be crushed by events, he held firmly to his conviction that Prussia could be saved, that it was only a matter of putting her on her feet again by means of radical reforms, and of liberating her at the same time from hostile occupation. We have dealt with the first problem, and it remains to show how he attacked the second.

Negotiations for the fixing of Prussia's debt had begun immediately after the conclusion of peace and the signature of the Convention of July 12th. The Prussians had hoped — it is not very clear on what grounds — that the enemy would be content with 20 million francs. Actually Daru, Intendant-General of the Grand Army, demanded, on Napoleon's instructions, 154 millions, of which 15 millions were to be paid on the spot. In October, Daru reduced the demand to 122 millions, but at the same time exacted, at a valuation of 50,000,000, the cession of all the Crown lands, with the rights attaching thereto. In reality, the domains were very much more valuable, the estimated capital

value being 250,000,000 and their annual yield 10,000,000. Their surrender would have made Napoleon the largest landowner in Germany.¹

The reconciliation of the Prussian and the French proposals soon met with unsurmountable difficulties. The negotiations dragged on without the slightest prospect of a result. As for the liberation of the occupied territories, it was no longer even discussed.

This was the diplomatic situation with which Stein was called upon to deal. And his first reaction was to submit, to have done with puerile discussions and make up his mind to a sacrifice. 'He feels it is necessary,' wrote his confidante Princess Louise Radziwill, 'to re-establish direct relations with Napoleon, and to work for the mitigation of the hard conditions imposed on the country by the treaties'.² Stein expresses the same idea in a letter dated October 14th to Hardenberg. 'The essential thing is now to get the French out of the country. I have recommended that we should not make difficulties as to the amount to be paid, provided we are given facilities as to the mode of paying it.'

Whatever his secret thoughts, therefore, Stein entered resolutely on the path of conciliation. To obtain the evacuation, which was more important than anything else, he would have to go warily, giving proofs of good will on the one hand, and appealing to pity at suitable moments on the other — a policy of 'finessing', to use a word which has come into vogue again in our own day³ and which

¹ The Emperor had himself suggested this cession in his *Note pour le traité d'évacuation* of July 12th, 1807. 'Thus only to be put forward at the last moment,' he added.

² Princess Louise of Prussia, Princess Radziwill, *Mémoires*, p. 62.

³ As is well known, Stresemann thus defined the character of his negotiations with Briand in a letter to the German Crown Prince. The resemblance between Stein's and Stresemann's attitudes is manifest and has been noted by German publicists. We read in E. Maraux's *Nationale Aussenpolitik* (Oldenburg, 1932, p. 21), 'A German statesman might rightly pay a high price for the evacuation of

Stein himself frequently applied to his opponents, notably Metternich.

When Brockhausen, the Prussian envoy, had made a fresh appeal to Napoleon to reduce the debt, the Emperor had 'laughed in his face'. In Stein's view, therefore, it was useless to insist further on this point, and effort should be concentrated on obtaining concessions as to the mode of payment and, above all, avoiding the cessions of the Crown lands or the surrender of more territories. Inexperienced as he was in diplomacy, for which he had no natural aptitudes, Stein cherished some strange illusions at this time. Completely misunderstanding the Napoleonic idea, he hoped to interest the Emperor in the preservation of Prussia through economic arguments. The court shared his illusions, and Queen Louise herself offered to go to Paris to negotiate. Had the snub of Tilsit taught her nothing? Or did she think still that she could soften this 'being without a human heart' whom nevertheless she had found to have 'a fine Roman-Emperor head and a kindly smile'?

Stein could not of course take so wild a scheme seriously. But he made another suggestion, that the King's brother, Prince William, a young married man of twenty-four, should be sent to the Emperor's court to propose an alliance with France — and even Prussia's adhesion to the Confederation of the Rhine — on condition of the immediate evacuation of the country (certain fortresses excepted) and the spreading of payments over three or four years.

This suggestion was accepted, and so as to make the most of what remained of the Queen's own prestige, she was to write an official letter to the Conqueror. In this letter, on the Rhineland. After the Prussian defeat of 1806, Stein (whom Stresemann has frequently and adroitly quoted) strongly favoured the payment of tribute to Napoleon, and was willing to go much further than Stresemann. But Stein was meditating something that Stresemann had eliminated from his calculations, namely *revanche*. Stein had no intention of making conciliation and concession a permanent policy; it was merely a temporary expedient to enable him to gain his end.

awkward mixture of the political ideas of Stein and the sentimental yearnings of Louise, the fair writer hoped that the negotiations about to be opened by her brother-in-law would have a happy issue. In heavy phrases, in which the Prime Minister's style and ideas are easily recognizable, she tried to show the Emperor the advantages of a more generous policy. 'Our country suffers cruelly from the presence of the armies, its resources are annihilated, and if this endures, it will never be able to recover, will offer no more *hope*, either for *us* or for our *friends*. As Your I.M. cannot but be our friend, You are depriving Yourself of a resource on which you could surely count.' And then a different note, the naive cry of the woman-heart: 'Our impending return to Berlin is again a natural consequence of what I have just put before Y.I.M. It is desirable above all for *me*, who am *suffering* more than anyone, physically and morally. As a tender mother, the education of my children is very near to me, and it cannot be looked after at all here. My *health* is absolutely destroyed, it cannot stand the wet cold of the North. I venture to put this forward as one of the reasons that might weigh with you, knowing, both of myself and from all that you have said about me, that you have a personal interest in me. Your Imperial Majesty is aware of the confidence I have in you, I spoke of it at Tilsit, and I flatter myself that once more you will follow the dictates of your heart and restore happiness to Prussia, to the King and to me. With this hope I am, Your Imperial Majesty's good Sister, Louise. Memel, November 4th, 1807.'¹

Prince William's mission marks the extremity of Prussia's impotence. Never had she fallen so low. 'Sending William is also one of those desperate throws,' wrote Louise in a reflective moment, 'it is the only thing left to do.' He was to be accompanied by the celebrated savant Alexander von

¹ Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prussia 13, No. 195.

Humboldt, and it was impressed on the young prince that he was to do all in his power to win the emperor's confidence, to express to him in the most emphatic terms the lively and sincere desire of the King to establish relations of most intimate unity with France and to remain faithfully and unvaryingly attached to her.¹ The prince's autograph letters, preserved in the archives of the Quai d'Orsay, show that he acquitted himself of his task with a spirit of humility, of obsequiousness even, that it is a shock to meet in a scion of the proud Hohenzollerns.

He writes, for instance, in sending his full powers to the Foreign Minister Champagny: 'I ardently desire that His Majesty will be able, from the way in which the document is phrased, to convince himself of the sincerity of the sentiments which animate the King and which I have tried to express to him. . . . I believe I may allow myself to hope that, far from our miseries being increased, I shall see them shortly lightened and their end in sight.' And four days later: 'Your Excellency has made me very happy in communicating the consoling response of his august Master, who by this new mark of kindness has reawakened in my soul the hope and confidence that rests on justice. The gratitude that I owe to your Excellency is equal to the esteem with which I remain, your very affectionate friend, William of Prussia.' On February 4th: 'Monsieur, I have just received gloomy figures relating to two of our unhappy provinces. In putting them before Your Excellency, I believe I am doing my duty to humanity, to my country and to France, for the Emperor is too just a monarch for it to be with his approval that such severity is applied in a country that is ruined and will be absolutely destroyed if such treatment be continued.'

On April 20th the young prince addressed Napoleon

¹ Letter of January 8th, 1808. This and the following letters are taken from the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Prussia 242, Nos. 12, 24, 64, 199).

himself to renew the proposition, already made spontaneously at his first audience, that he should take him as a hostage. He appealed to the 'generosity and benevolence' of the sovereign. 'Representing at Your Majesty's Court my King, his family and the remnant of a once flourishing monarchy, I should be unworthy of this high position if I did not try, by all the means in my power, to re-establish the harmony on which depends the happiness of all that I hold dear. The King has made every sacrifice to win the friendship of France. He has proved it by the Convention which was his answer to the proposals of M. Daru. . . . Be pleased then, Sire, to accept this Convention, and deign to give me the happiness of having been of use to my country. But in case Your Majesty still has doubts of the King's sincerity, I renew my offer to remain in your hands as a hostage until the indemnity shall have been paid, either wholly or in part. Your Imperial and Royal Majesty's most humble and obedient Servant and Cousin, William Prince of Prussia.'

Stein approved and encouraged all these advances of the young prince. He wrote to his mentor Humboldt that 'we must keep to the line of conduct that we have traced for ourselves; we must try to regain Napoleon's confidence and set Prussia on her feet again by the aid of France'. In order to flatter the Emperor's *amour propre* he begged Humboldt to explain to him that the great reforms in Prussia were 'an imitation of the Napoleonic legislation and its aim of developing civilization'. He caused Prince William to be informed that the Tsar Alexander 'advises him to go to all lengths in condescension', highly commends his offer of himself as a hostage, 'sacrificing all that is dear and sacred to him for his country and honour, a rare thing indeed in our wretched selfish times'. It is impossible, Stein continued, that so generous an act should not have considerable results. 'Napoleon will have greater confidence in the assurances

Your Highness gives him as to Prussia's disposition, and your great and generous character will serve him as warranty for the future conduct of that Power.' The letter, dated February 19th, closes with an important piece of news. 'His Royal Majesty has instructed me to proceed to Berlin and enter into negotiations with M. Daru. I start next week, but I shall conclude nothing without ascertaining the position from Your Highness.'

One more of Stein's illusions! He thought that his personal intervention in the negotiations begun between Daru and Councillor Sack might influence the course of events. To take the place of Sack, a subordinate official 'who has not even the title of Excellency', the all-powerful Stein himself hastens in person, leaving his immense legislative activities and the direction of current business to look after themselves. Surely Daru would be suitably impressed by this mark of attention?

Stein had already met 'that monster Daru,' as he called him, on his way from Nassau to Memel, and the two men had even had some preliminary exchanges of views on the debt question. At that time Stein, although he had been summoned by the King, was still only a private person. Nevertheless Daru had naturally shown a prudent reserve, being not at all desirous that the potential Prime Minister of Prussia should find in his words 'the appearance of a concession'. 'If M. de Stein was not talking in good faith in this conference,' wrote Daru to the Emperor on September 30th, 1807, 'it has told him nothing. If he was speaking frankly, it has expedited the progress of the business, which we shall try to conduct with promptitude and a good grace.' For all that Sack asserted Daru to be 'an intractable fellow and our determined enemy', Stein had thus had the opportunity, in this first contact, of judging for himself of the Intendant-General's uprightness and fairness, and he expected to arrive quickly at an agreement with him.

Not everyone shared this optimism. Bignon, who was an eyewitness, tells us that agreement was regarded as impossible from the moment of Stein's arrival. The characters of the Minister and Daru were both too absolute, too masterful, for conciliation. It was stone against stone, 'Stein' against 'Pierre' as was wittily remarked. Nevertheless, perfectly correct, if not cordial, relations were established between them from the first. 'I was particularly well placed to judge,' adds Bignon, 'as M. Daru very much liked to have me with him to act as a sedative in the arguments that he supposed would arise.'

The discussions were brief and courteous. Two conferences sufficed for Stein and Daru to come to terms, and on March 9th the latter was able to write to Champagny that 'the King of Prussia has sent here M. de Stein his Finance Minister, who has declared to me that he has full powers to settle. He has given me the draft of a Convention . . . I would like to receive as soon as possible instructions enabling me to proceed'.¹

According to this draft Convention, the total debt was fixed at 147 millions, conformably to the wishes of France. But the revenues of the country collected since October 1st were set off against this sum, which was thus reduced to 112 millions. The evacuation was to take place thirty days after the signature of the Treaty, after which three fortresses only, with garrisons totalling 9,000 instead of 40,000, were to remain in French hands until the debt had been completely discharged. As to the mode of payment, Stein proposed, for 50,000,000 of the whole, short-term bonds, to meet which the King's diamonds and plate would be sold, economies effected in the administration, silver in private possession and the credit of leading merchants pledged, and if possible loans raised abroad. Further — a distinctly unexpected suggestion — since the Tsar Alexander was in

¹ Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prussia 1808, No. 87.

debt to Prussia, Napoleon might accept in part payment, at a valuation agreed with him, the Russian squadron of Admiral Seniavin,¹ which was blockaded in the Tagus (!). For the other half of the indemnity, long-term 'land bonds' would be issued, secured on those Crown lands that had excited the Emperor's cupidity. 'This is the principal proposition,' wrote Daru, 'that to which most importance attaches. I believe these land bonds to be sound assets.'²

The plan was undoubtedly ingenious, and Stein could flatter himself that he had won. Already he was envisaging the liberation of Prussia for the end of April. 'I believe our situation *vis-à-vis* Napoleon is improved,' he wrote to his colleague Altenstein. 'I believe they do not mean to annihilate us, and that the problem of the payment of the indemnity can be solved.' He appeared at a fête given by Marshal Victor on the Emperor's birthday, and made a point of expressing his satisfaction in diplomatic circles. Rechberg, the Bavarian representative in Berlin, wrote to his chief Montgelas, that 'M. de Stein not only hopes for mitigations, such as the return of the country into the hands of the Prussian officials, but even flatters himself that he can obtain the departure of the French army'.³

Was Stein sincere at this time? Was he really prepared, during these negotiations with Daru, to carry out the promises he gave to the Intendant-General? Certain historians have doubted it; thus M. Charles Lesage, the author of a brilliant study of these earlier 'reparations', is convinced that Prussia was from the first exercising all her ingenuity to find pretexts for not paying her creditor, that she considered that the conventions and treaties which ended the war did not bind the vanquished party that had signed

¹ Russia and England were at war in consequence of the Tilsit settlement. — TRANSLATOR.

² Daru to Champagny, April 7th, 1808 (Arch., Min. Foreign Aff. Prussia 1808, No. 243).

³ This Bavarian report, dated April 2nd, 1808, came to the knowledge of French diplomacy, and a copy is in Arch. Min. Foreign Affairs (Prussia 242).

them, since they were acts of force belonging really to the war period itself, and that it was a duty to evade their disastrous consequences.¹

A hundred years earlier Bignon had expressed the same view. According to him, Stein began to try on his 'fatal system' from the moment he returned to Berlin. It is alleged that he created difficulties for the French authorities every day, sabotaged (through his employees) the investigations undertaken by Daru's administration, and even produced an artificial famine in Berlin, which was only ended by the energy of the French in discovering hidden supplies. Lastly, he regards it as a point against Stein that he proposed the sale of the Crown diamonds and plate, an expedient, he says, which 'manifestly aimed at throwing odium on the Emperor, who was thereby made to appear as driving the King to this rigorous extremity'.

Certainly, the evidence of Bignon, who was so intimately mixed up in these events, cannot be disregarded, and German historians have shown some disingenuousness in passing it over. Nevertheless it is allowable to think that Daru's collaborator was going too far in asserting so categorically that in March-May 1808 Stein was acting in bad faith. He had not of course turned into a Francophile, and it was without any enthusiasm whatever that he faced the prospect of paying 'tribute'. It is quite possible, too, that, without going so far as to organize a famine, he made use of such opportunities as presented themselves for doing the French authorities a bad turn. But admitting this, all his letters and all his administrative acts go to show that *during this period* he was a convinced supporter of the policy of performance which he believed to be in the best interests of his country. We have seen what instructions he gave Prince William and the spirit in which he expressed himself to his

¹ Ch, Lesage *Napoléon Ier, créancier de la Prusse*, Paris, 1924.

confidants. As late as May 8th he reported to the King that 'it has seemed to me best, in the circumstances, to enter into the Emperor's views with some emphasis, so as to prevent M. Daru, whose *amour propre* has been singularly hurt by the appearance of resistance that he has met, from giving himself up to his feelings of hate'.

Moreover, he could scarcely have been naive enough to suppose that Napoleon would content himself with vague promises — such a hypothesis is an insult to his intelligence. And he did in fact initiate a whole series of measures for implementing the Convention in anticipation of the Emperor's approval. For one thing, there was the famous sale of the jewels and plate, for another the dispatch of Niebuhr, his best financier, to Hesse, Holland and England in quest of loans. An income tax was imposed in East Prussia, with the consent of the Diet — an extraordinary measure that he hoped in due course to apply to other provinces. Lastly, he set up a whole system by which the Crown lands could be pledged, and to do this it was necessary to obtain the consent of the loan banks set up by the nobility of the provinces and the approval of the delegates of the provincial Diets. To this complicated task he addressed himself immediately and with his best energies, and he was able to solve it very satisfactorily.

Is not all this proof enough that in the first months of his ministry Stein was acting in good faith?

But the tragedy of the situation was that all his reasoning rested on false premisses. He had convinced Daru, but he completely forgot that the Intendant-General, who was so important a personage in the capital of defeated Prussia, was merely a secondary executant of the Imperial will, a docile tool in the master's hand. And so it was in vain that he — like Daru for that matter — waited for the Emperor's approval to be given to the draft Convention worked out between them. After some weeks, Napoleon signified that

he would never be content with less than 140 millions. He angrily rejected the proposal for a deal over the Russian squadron, scenting in it a hidden purpose of embroiling him with Alexander. 'I do not know what M. de Stein means by proposing the purchase of the Russian fleet. I only regard it as a transaction insulting to Russia, that would be made to appear as coming from me.'¹ On the fundamental question — the conditions and date of the evacuation — he disdained even to give an answer. 'We shall see, we must wait and see,' was all that Prince William could get out of him, apart from 'most gracious smiles'.

Stein might easily have foreseen that such would be the attitude of his mighty opponent. Had not Napoleon, in his interview with Prince William on January 8th, rejected all suggestions of an alliance between the two countries? Had he not declared that what he wanted was not a hostage but security? And had he not confirmed this a few weeks later by telling the prince that it was not a matter of a few millions more or less? 'It is not a question of money but of policy, the solution of your affairs has its place in the grand combinations of general policy.' Nothing could have been more brutally frank than this. And if Stein still had doubts, he might have read with more attention the penetrating analysis that Sack had received from Humboldt in Paris — 'it is high time that we should stop concealing the true state of affairs from ourselves. . . . The offers of an offensive and defensive alliance, the promises to place an army corps at the disposal of France, this willingness to join the new Germanic body — none of them produce the slightest effect, perhaps because they offer nothing of which the conqueror is not already sure.'

To-day we know, in all its details, the fundamental idea of Napoleon that Stein failed to guess. If he envisaged, as M. Lesage asserts that he did, a speedy evacuation of the

¹ Napoleon to Daru, March 27th, 1808.

troops quartered in Prussia, it was only for a moment, and he quickly abandoned the idea and reverted to the policy of conquest. The rebuilding of Prussia's power was the last thing that he would wish to see, for he regarded the 'denationalization of Germany' as 'one of the essential maxims' of his policy. 'All the Prussians are burning with the desire for vengeance,' he said to Alexander once, 'and they would like me to give them the means of it. As I cannot count on a sincere reconciliation, I must make it impossible for Prussia to do anything whatever against the interests of France.' As early as the autumn of 1807 he was contemplating further mutilations of the Prussian territory, which were to reduce Frederick William's kingdom to the limits of the old Brandenburg Electorate and push it back to the shores of the Baltic. All these plans are set forth in detail in the famous instruction of September 12th, 1807, which Champagny, with the Emperor's approval, handed to Caulaincourt on the latter's departure to take up the post of ambassador at St. Petersburg. 'Prussia,' it says, 'would no longer have a population of more than two millions, but would not that be enough for the comfort of the Royal Family, and would it not be to their interest to take their place at once, and with sincere resignation, amongst the smaller Powers, since all efforts to regain the position it has lost could only serve to torture its peoples and to keep alive vain regrets?'

And it was the friendship of a man capable of dictating documents like these that Stein hoped to buy with bonds and land-pledges! A disastrous error, difficult to comprehend and bound to lead to the completest of disillusionments.

Weary of the long wait, Stein left Berlin on May 26th, and returned to Königsberg with his hands as empty as when he had started.

We have arrived at a decisive turning-point. At this moment Stein underwent an extraordinary change. Abandoning entirely his policy of conciliation, he proclaimed the necessity of breaking with France. The *furor teutonicus* reawakened in him, that fevered and dangerous rush of patriotism that had inspired his attitude during the 1795 invasion and before Jena. But then his role had been a minor one, whereas to-day he was in power, able to throw the weight of his dictatorial authority into the scale, strong enough, as he felt, to carry the hesitating with him and to bring about a great national movement. He meant to command events instead of accepting them.

This man, hitherto so set, so balanced, forgets everything that the voice of prudence might suggest to him. He tells his friends that he feels in himself the urge of the filibuster, the *condottiere*, almost the adventurer. And he dashes head-first on to the path of political adventure.

What were the reasons for this abrupt change of attitude? Anger at having been cheated by Napoleon? Bitterness over the ever-increasing miseries of the Prussian people? Intoxication of power? The adulation of friends, who turned his repulse over the Daru negotiations into a triumph? Something of each of these factors, but something more still.

Stein's return to Königsberg coincided with the arrival of news of the troubles in Spain. The *émeute* of the Second of May, the dispossession of the Bourbons, the armed uprising of the people — all Europe quivered when it heard of the dramatic chain of events. It was the struggle of peoples succeeding the struggle of kings, the first crack in the grandiose Napoleonic structure. At once all hopes and all hatreds revived. What was the use of imposing sacrifices on one's self at the moment when Napoleon was withdrawing three army corps from Prussia and sending them post-haste to Spain? Was it not, rather, the moment to take up arms

and drive the enemy over the frontier? What Spain was doing, surely Prussia could do?

The situations, it is true, were not identical. The combined populations of Spain and Portugal numbered 13,000,000, that of Prussia hardly 5,000,000. The Spaniards were actually engaged and defending themselves, whereas Prussia had already abandoned all her fortresses to the Conqueror. And, lastly, the efforts of the Peninsular insurgents were supported by Great Britain, while Prussia had long lost all her allies.

But Scharnhorst and Gneisenau, the key men of the Prussian army, were not deterred by these considerations. They were aware of opinion at Vienna, where the Emperor Francis was contemplating the possibility of a new war — for since the deposition of the King of Spain no monarch felt safe on his throne. Ought not Prussia to encourage Austria in her preparations, and to join in as soon as the blow was struck? And ought not the Königsberg government to set about taking the necessary measures at once, so as to be ready when the decisive struggle against France should come?

Stein unhesitatingly ranged himself with them, and the triumvirate Stein-Scharnhorst-Gneisenau, which drew together in the summer of 1808, was destined to exercise a decisive influence on the future of Prussia. The three friends, with an entourage of some faithful supporters (Nicolovius, Schön, Suvern, the pastor Röckner), constituted a sort of secret society of which the object was to discover ways and means of 'effacing the nation's shame'. They met, without formality, once a week. 'Stein hurled the thunderbolts, Röckner and Gneisenau fanned the flame, Scharnhorst strove to put the ideas in order, while Schön searched for practical solutions.'¹ For it was not a matter of empty discussions. While the soldiers were feverishly carrying

¹ Schön, *Souvenirs*.

through the reorganization of the army, Stein was speeding up all the other wheels of State. Reforming activity was at its height. The application of the Edict of Emancipation was in train, and the administrative and municipal reforms were being worked out. And it was at this moment that Stein began to prepare the War of Independence.

As late as May he had said, in a moment of discouragement, that 'it would be granted only to future generations to free themselves from the yoke of despotism'. In June, he was still waiting impatiently for the decision from Paris and declaring that he could not understand the Emperor's silence. But now the scales had fallen from his eyes. 'From the moment that we are convinced that Napoleon's despotism and ambitions are in fact unlimited, we must expect nothing from treaties and everything from our own forces.' 'The fall and enslavement of Germany,' he declared, 'were brought about by the lack of union and cohesion in a mass of 36,000,000 human beings that in itself is strong enough to resist any conqueror whatsoever.'

The first statement of the new policy appears in his report to the King of July 27th. 'The hour has come,' he writes 'when an end must be put to the rivalry and jealousy that has divided Prussia and Austria for eighty years. The two States must come together in a spirit of mutual confidence, so that thereby Germany may find her independence again.'

The report of August 10th, written after the capitulation of Baylen,¹ is much more explicit. 'It is imperative that Prussia and Austria should unite if they wish to safeguard their existence and strike down the common enemy. The destinies of the two countries are closely linked: Austria beaten, Prussia is irremediably lost. Hence Prussia must throw in all her troops, regular and insurrectionary, the

¹ Surrender of a French army corps to the Spaniards, July 22nd, 1808. — TRANSLATOR.

moment a war breaks out between Austria and France. Germany should be liberated by the German nation as a whole.' When the moment came, the 'Landsturm', or *levée en masse*, should be proclaimed in all provinces. The men should form round their provincial colours, but should mount one and the same cockade of the combined Prussian and Austrian colours — black, white and yellow. 'We must envisage the possibility of defeat, for we must not forget the greatness and power of the enemy that we are attacking. We must tell ourselves that we are entering on the struggle without being assured of success, but certain that otherwise annihilation is inevitable and that it is more honourable, in the sight of contemporaries and of History alike, to die for King and Country with our arms in our hands than meekly to drag along the chains of slavery. In taking this new road we shall have to undergo suffering of all kinds, if not death, and we must accustom ourselves to the thought.'

Neither the direction of such a policy of despair nor the passionate style in which it was urged were likely to find favour with a pusillanimous king. 'All this is pure poetry,' Frederick William remarked one day about a similar document. But Gneisenau met him with the famous rejoinder, 'the security of thrones, too, rests only on poetry!' The King, in fact, had to reckon with the popular excitement that was behind his counsellors, and with the spirit of the time, for did not even the Prussian officials who were Stein's immediate subordinates discharge their overflowing imaginations in sending patriotic poems to their chief? And after all the King knew well enough that these wild men, these Prussian 'desperadoes', were, for all their romanticism, shrewd politicians and masters of organization and of propaganda.

On August 23rd Frederick William summoned his ministers in conference. He listened to their statement but, as was his habit, made reservations, and would not admit that their arguments had convinced him. Nevertheless he

authorized them to open negotiations at once with England with a view to procuring arms and subsidies. On the other parts of the programme he gave no decision, but left Stein and his friends with their hands free. Now they could begin without hindrance to foment the spirit of revolt.

It was about this time that the activities of the 'Tugendbund' (League of Virtue) began. Whatever may have been said to the contrary, Stein was not the creator of this ultra-patriotic secret society, and he declared on his honour that he had never belonged to it.

It was in all probability during Stein's absence in Berlin that the original group, composed of young officers, officials and landed nobles — Freemasons for the most part — drew together. In the list of founder members we find amongst others the names of von Below, von Linsingen, and Privy Councillor Ribbentrop.¹ But presently these first Leaguers were joined by some more important personalities — Eichhorn, the eminent legal historian; Merckel, a high official of the War Ministry; Grolman, the future Chief of the General Staff; Boyen, the future Minister of War — all fervent patriots and no less fervent admirers of Stein.²

Unlike other secret societies, the Tugendbund practised no symbolic rite of initiation. All that was demanded of the neophyte was a solemn oath that he would continually subject himself to the examination of his conscience, that he would put aside all selfish aspirations, devote himself wholly to the true 'moral and scientific' aims of the League and remain faithful to the common task in spite of all dangers and persecutions.

What, then, was this 'moral and scientific' task to which

¹ Names that were to reappear in the history of our own times — Below and Linsingen as army commanders in the Great War and Ribbentrop as one of Chancellor Hitler's intimate collaborators.

² We have ascertained that certain Russians also participated in this association of Prussian patriots. Amongst others, Lieutenant Barclay de Tolly, son of the famous commander of 1812, was a member.

the 'Virtuous Brother' was to devote himself? He was called upon to 'hearten the spirits reduced to despair by the nation's ills, to relieve suffering both individual and national, to intensify education in a national spirit, to hasten the re-establishment of the army and to heighten patriotism and devotion to the Royal House'. All 'political activity' was strictly forbidden, but nevertheless every member of the League was bound to seek out traitors and to keep an organized watch on suspected persons and, especially, the clergy. All this seems at first sight very nebulous, and only very distantly related to the cultivation of Virtue. But the relation is clear enough when we know the unavowed aims of the Leaguers. 'Evil' for them was identical with Napoleon, and to fight against evil meant to fight against France. Whoever would not participate in the national movement became a suspected person, and the clergyman who from his pulpit exhorted the flock to resignation and submissiveness under established authority was the reverse of a good shepherd.

An organization of this character was precisely what Stein needed at this moment — a docile instrument for preparing the national uprising in shadow and mystery. He was convinced, as Schön tells us, that the members of the Tugendbund would be puppets whose strings he would pull as he pleased. He therefore caused the King to approve its statutes semi-officially, interested Queen Louise in its activities, and induced one of the junior members of the royal house to join it.

The importance of the Tugendbund came to be greatly exaggerated in the sequel, thanks in part to the inaccurate appreciations of French¹ and Austrian diplomatists. It suited the lively imaginations of the Vienna police to transform the Königsberg patriots into 'dangerous Jacobins' and 'adherents of the disastrous theories of Kant'. Certain

¹ Reports of Clérambault, December 17th, 1808, and April 4th, 1809.

Prussian reactionaries of Francophil leanings also did their part by spreading equally absurd notions about the League. 'The members of the Tugendbund form a sect; they are the German Jacobins,' declared Prince Hatzfeldt to a French diplomat. 'Under the mask of patriotism they conceal doctrines that they do not avow, but which are now no secret from anyone.' Old Field-Marshal Kalkreuth expressed himself likewise, and announced that he himself would now proceed to form a new league, the League of Vice.

In reality, the activities of the Tugendbund in 1809 did not achieve a great deal. All in, the membership amounted to no more than 400, and it was soon seen that the Virtuous Brothers were incapable of any vast conspiracy. The good intentions that animated them were insufficient to compensate for their lack of political knowledge, experience and skill, while the surveillance that they exercised over the 'suspects' was childish. One cannot but smile when one reads some of the naive reports preserved in the files of the Tugendbund — on the suspicious movements of an organ-grinder, on the way of life of a French ex-officer named Maréchal, and on the activities of the inevitable Jew, one Wolf Ouss, 'who lives facing the house of the late Kant'. This last dangerous fellow, it appeared, maintained continuous relations with numerous Polish co-religionists and had 'lighted up all his candles on August 15th, Napoleon's birthday, thereby attracting a crowd under his windows!'

The significance of the Tugendbund in 1808 was essentially symbolic. It was a name that rallied all the 'well-disposed'. Branches of the League were started in all the towns of Prussia. Other groups, more or less organized but all imbued with a like spirit, arose in many places with the aim of fomenting insurrection, spying on the movements of French troops and secretly collecting arms. 'All,' wrote Stein in his memoirs, 'were athirst for vengeance. Out-

breaks were planned with the aim of destroying the French who were scattered over the country. A project of this kind was to have been put into execution in Berlin, and I had all the difficulty in the world in stopping this premature act, the instigators of which had taken me into their confidence.'

This Berlin league is that which is mentioned by Schleiermacher a famous preacher, in his writings. It had neither statutes nor headquarters, and men joined without formality — it was a group of kindred patriotic spirits who had devoted themselves to the national cause. Schleiermacher himself was the *liaison* with Königsberg, and he was in constant touch with Stein, who in his secret correspondence used the name 'Christian' (*Christ*). In Pomerania, the patriots grouped themselves round General Blücher, and in Silesia round another of Stein's friends and confidants, Count Götzen.¹

Silesia, lying next door to Austria, was the province where, according to the plans of the conspirators, the insurrection was to break out on the declaration of war, and this fact gave special importance to the work entrusted to Götzen. He was instructed to enter into secret relations with the Vienna government, to buy 20,000 muskets in Austria, to establish depots of arms and to organize shooting clubs which could serve as a nucleus for the constitution of a militia. Götzen set to work, and a little later was able to tell the heads of the Tugendbund that 'thanks to the vigilance of our League, all the searches and arrests made by the French have given them no compromising information, as we have always managed to hide everything in time'.

Final success did in fact depend on concealment. At all costs the Emperor's vigilance must be put to sleep, and this was the task assigned to the diplomatic side. To that end,

¹ Götzen had organized an energetic local resistance in Silesia after the collapse of Jena. — TRANSLATOR.

something more than declarations of submission was needed — Paris was already accustomed to such. Bourrienne, Bernadotte's secretary, advised Prussia to renew the proposal for an alliance — well, why not? Was not everything justified when it was a matter of saving the country? 'Is Napoleon alone to be permitted to replace right by arbitrariness and truth by lying?' exclaimed Stein, and with that our virtuous Puritan embarked on a policy of tortuous duplicity. The proposal was to be made to the Emperor that in case of a war between France and Austria, a Prussian corps of 40,000 men should be at the former's disposal. As the Prussian army consisted of 30,000, the Emperor was to furnish arms for the mobilization of the balance. 'We will give him an army corps,' wrote Stein, 'but we can manœuvre it in such a way that at the right moment it can join Austria against the common enemy.'

Absorbed as he would be in the affairs of Spain, the Emperor would certainly fall into the trap. At the given signal, the Prussian people would rise and make the plains of the Elbe another Vendée. Napoleon would be placed between two fires, and the huge edifice of his empire would inevitably fall to the ground.

The plan was astute, and perhaps in some degree practicable. But there was one grave error in the calculations. As always, he reckoned without the Emperor's perspicacity.

CHAPTER X

THE INTERCEPTED LETTER

ON August 25th, 1808, a young Prussian official named Koppe, who had arrived from Königsberg the day before, was arrested at Tegel, a suburb of Berlin, by two French gendarmes. This arbitrary measure, which had no apparent justification, was taken by order of Marshal Soult himself, probably on the statement of an informer. Koppe was brought into Berlin, subjected to a brief examination by the town commandant, and searched. On him there was found hidden under his shirt a leather bag containing many letters.¹

The archives of the Quai d'Orsay have preserved some of these — a long missive in slender Gothic characters signed 'Stein' and giving Prince Wittgenstein, the Duke of Hesse's confidant, some technical information regarding the financial negotiations, and also a proxy to the banker Dehn. But the capital document is missing, and all the efforts of the archivists have failed to recover it; no doubt it disappeared in the whirl of events.

This capital document is the private autograph letter addressed by Stein to the same Prince Wittgenstein and dated August 15th, 1808, which revealed to Napoleon the dark designs of the Prussian Prime Minister.

Whatever may have been said to the contrary, Napoleon was in general very ill-informed as to the state of mind of the peoples of Europe — so much so that one is tempted to think that the Emperor and his representatives attached little importance thereto. It would seem that the breath

¹ See letter of Count Goltz to Daru, September 1st, 1808 (Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

of the Revolution had died out on the steps of the chancelleries, for in reading the correspondence of Bignon, Saint-Marsan and Napoleon's other representatives in Prussia with Talleyrand and Champagny, one finds nothing but reports of their conversations with Prussian diplomats — Zastrow, Hardenberg, Goltz, Lucchesini — who spoke 'in the name of their Master the King'. Nowhere is there any question of national aspirations or popular movements. Did Napoleon himself ever think otherwise than in cabinet formulae, in terms of kings and kingdoms, thrones overturned or set up?

Throughout 1808, moreover, Napoleon had no representative accredited to the Prussian Court — Saint-Marsan only arrived at Berlin in the last days of December. The military authorities were of course on the spot, but Daru's reports are always those of a conscientious administrator dealing with requisitions, payments made, infringements of the blockade regulations, and the like. The generals, indeed, were in touch with the civil population. But their impressions were naive, often 'dominated still by memories of the welcome that the armies of the Revolution had met with in more than one place, by a highly subjective idea of the pleasure that must be caused by the arrival of French troops anywhere, and by a blithe and joyous sentiment of superiority'.¹ And at best the soldiers could only give sporadic pieces of information, their field of observation being naturally limited. The activities of the military police were not much more informative; they concerned themselves as usual with insignificant matters, without penetrating below the surface.

As to Stein and his reforming activities, Napoleon was almost entirely in ignorance. It must be supposed that it was only out of pure politeness that he one day eulogized

¹ Cavaignac, *La Saisie de la lettre de Stein en 1808* (*Revue Historique*, Vol. 60, 1896). This author further says that the Emperor was 'exceedingly well informed', a statement which his evidences conclusively contradict.

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him to Prince William, 'doing full justice to his talents', for a few months later, on July 18th, 1808, we find him writing to General Clarke¹ thus: 'As to Stein, I do not know what he is. The King of Prussia has much to say against him. If he is not too old I think it might be advantageous to win him over.'(!!) Presumably he had forgotten that he had once recommended Stein to the King. Is it in the least likely, then, that he realized that this Stein had become the organizer of a movement in Prussia similar to that which was already threatening the Imperial power in Spain?²

The letters seized on Koppe reached the Emperor on September 2nd. 'I send you a quite extraordinary letter, so far as I can understand it,' he wrote to Champagny. 'Have it translated and let me have a report so that we can discuss it to-morrow morning at the levee, and therewith I pray God to have you in His holy keeping.'

Next morning accordingly Napoleon was bending over the intercepted letter. Such is the force of genius that he instantly and with complete clarity saw the whole gravity of the situation in Germany.

What, then, had Stein written? First, he mentioned the alliance proposition and the offer of an auxiliary corps. 'If in the present circumstances, when we can be of use to H.M. the Emperor, he declines our propositions, it proves that his design is to annihilate us, and, if so, we must be prepared for anything.' 'The exasperation in Germany daily increases; we must keep it up and try to work on the people. I should very much like contacts to be maintained in Hesse and Westphalia in readiness for certain events, for relations to be established with energetic men of good intentions and for these again to get into touch with others. . . . Affairs in Spain are making a very lively impression, they prove what

¹ *Correspondance*, 15.429.

² The Prussian files in the Quai d'Orsay archives contain absolutely nothing on the subject of Stein's activities and reforms, apart from the text of the Edict of Emancipation, which is accompanied by a translation but no commentary.

we ought to have seen long ago. It would be most useful if the news could be prudently spread about, since it shows on the one hand how far trickery and the desire for domination can go, and on the other what a nation that has strength and courage can do.¹

The first reaction aroused in Napoleon by the perusal of these lines is truly worthy of our admiration.

That very day, the unfortunate Prince William, who was still languishing in Paris, was summoned by M. de Champagny, along with the Prussian Minister Brockhausen. Peremptorily he was invited to sign a convention on absolutely new terms, which had never hitherto been suggested. Napoleon would give the King his capital back and gradually restore his provinces — a concession that could not well be avoided at a moment when Napoleon was compelled somehow to disengage his troops for service in Spain. But on the other hand he would not yield by a centime on the debt, which was definitively fixed at 150,000,000, and he would keep, amongst other guarantees for its payment, the three Oder fortresses of Stettin, Küstrin and Glogau, and limit the Prussian army to 42,000 men.

Prince William, startled, refused to subscribe to demands so unforeseen. Thereupon Champagny put before him Stein's letter, giving him twenty-four hours to reflect on the consequences of refusal — an ultimatum, purely and simply. Brockhausen then tried to save the situation by questioning the authenticity of the letter, but in vain, for Champagny presented other letters of Stein for comparison of the signatures. The Prussian diplomat could only bow to the evidence and admit that the treachery was proved.

Terrified, seeing his country about to be subjected, and justifiably, to still harsher treatment, Prince William signed the Convention on September 8th without being

¹ This last phrase was eliminated from the text published by the *Moniteur* of September 8th, 1808 (which we have used for our translation), but it is found in that sent to Napoleon from Berlin and preserved in the archives of the War Ministry.

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allowed the possibility of consulting his sovereign. He attached his signature also to a secret annexe to the treaty, whereby the King of Prussia was to dismiss all his servants who were born in the countries now detached from the monarchy. This was, of course, aimed in particular at Stein whom the Emperor, misinformed on the point, persisted in regarding as a native of a Prussian province.

Next day Stein's letter, with its most dangerous passage cut out, and accompanied by biting comments, appeared in the *Journal de l'Empire*. 'The King of Prussia is to be commiserated with in having Ministers as clumsy as they are perverse. The proposition for an alliance and an auxiliary corps could never have entered a sane man's head. M. de Stein ought to have realized that the Emperor knew the Prussian Ministers, and that he had dealt with Prussia quite enough to know how much store to set by the engagements contracted by her.' 'So, Monsieur de Stein!' continues the semi-official journalist, 'you would promote insurrection in Hesse and Westphalia and at the same time be the ally of France! Were there ever seen side by side two paragraphs revealing greater ignorance and bad faith combined?' He charged Stein with wilfully pushing Germany over a precipice. 'You would have her suffer the misery of Spain, you prepare to give her the horrible spectacle of magistrates torn to pieces, of towns burnt and of all the horrors of foreign and civil war together. You are an evil citizen. Germany will now know you for what you are, and take note of these fine sentiments of yours on her behalf.' The governmental mouthpiece showered abuse on Stein, 'one of these perverted people who betray the honour and interest of their master and their country, but who fortunately are without courage or talent or means, as well as destitute of any feeling for greatness and justice'. 'The slightest breeze that stirs the air scatters all the scribblings of their politics.' He addresses a sounding

appeal to Prussians and to all Germans: 'Read this letter; this is the sort of minister that has cost you the respect and esteem of Europe. Germans, read this letter, and see the miseries that such men desire for your country.' Then, turning to the French public, he cries indignantly: 'We had a right to gratitude, and all we have done is to oblige and to rescue a lot of ingrates.' And generally, he threatens the 'knave unmasked' with punishment: 'And you, Monsieur de Stein, either you will account for your abominable schemes before the tribunals of Westphalia or your immense estates will be confiscated.'

This curious diatribe bears visible marks of Imperial inspiration; if it is read with attention there will be found in it a whole political programme that Napoleon had conceived in a few days. 'He, who could not suffer patriotic feeling in France, even though it had prepared and opened his way to the French throne, how was it possible for him to tolerate it in another people . . . especially where he saw that a national stirring in Prussia might set a barrier to his ambition?'¹

Having thus, by the Convention of September 8th, imposed the hardest and most humiliating conditions on Prussia, and made it impossible for her to re-arm, the Emperor next set about separating her from the dangerous man who governed her destinies; this achieved, she would be definitely transformed into a docile instrument of French policy. As for Stein himself, he would be hunted down without mercy. It was not enough to denounce, *urbi et orbi*, the duplicity of his policy, he must receive exemplary chastisement, so that Europe should understand that the Emperor did not allow himself to be braved with impunity. This was to be taken in hand at once.

On September 4th Napoleon wrote to Marshal Soult: 'I have your letter of August 26th. M. de Stein's letter seems

¹ Bourrienne, *Mémoires*, Ch. xxvii.

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to me quite extraordinary. I think it would be a good thing to send Koppe to France under a strong and sure guard, so that he can be interrogated in detail. Extract what you can out of him meanwhile by putting him in solitary confinement and interrogating him. These Prussians are poor wretched fellows.¹

Two days later the Emperor wrote to his brother Jerome, King of Westphalia: 'My brother, Champagne will have sent you M. de Stein's letter. You should put a sequestration order on this individual's properties in your kingdom and have him cited before your courts. He is your subject and his character as such is inalienable,² and if he does not present himself his property should be confiscated. P.S. — Provisionally, have the sequestration put on.' On September 10th, two days after the signature of the Convention, he writes again to Soult: 'You will see from the papers what is thought about M. de Stein's letter. I have demanded that he shall be dismissed from the Ministry, otherwise the King of Prussia will not return to his capital. Further, I have had a sequestration put on his properties in Westphalia.'

But, strangest thing of all, these orders, instructions and menaces remained a dead letter for many months!

It was only on September 21st that the first news of the events at Paris reached Königsberg. Till then there was not the slightest suspicion. The Emperor Alexander had been received on his way to meet Napoleon at Erfurt, and he had given Stein a long audience. The Prussian minister permitted himself to criticize with heat the autocrat's whole foreign policy; was he not weakening the military and

¹ Koppe was transferred to Doberau and thence to the fortress of Spandau. Later he was taken to France and imprisoned at Fort Jouve, in the same cell which had received Toussaint l'Ouverture, the famous leader of the negro insurrection in San Domingo. Thence he was moved to Dijon, where he was kept for some years. At the time of the Restoration he was Consul-general of Prussia in Mexico.

² Be it remarked that here again Napoleon was wrong. Stein could in no sense be considered a Westphalian subject.

economic forces of Russia in fighting Turkey and Sweden at a time when a great danger more and more threatened 'the cause of the liberty of the peoples'? He had explained with utter frankness his schemes for a national uprising of Germany, and asked Alexander to mediate with Napoleon for the return of the prisoners of war, who would usefully swell the ranks of the Prussian army, and for the speeding-up of the evacuation; once the French had gone, the *levée en masse* could be proclaimed and the Oder fortresses, Magdeburg and Westphalia attacked with a rush.

The Tsar was neither shocked nor annoyed by Stein's unusual language, for his first enthusiasm for Napoleon had already cooled off. He repeatedly advised caution, but he let it be seen that in case of war between Austria and France he would not intervene on the side of Napoleon. He promised moreover to do his best with Napoleon at Erfurt to bring about an alleviation of Prussia's lot, and even suggested that he should present the Prime Minister to the French Emperor, to which end Stein should travel to Leipzig so as to be at hand if called on. Stein had every reason therefore to be well satisfied with the results of the meeting. 'The Emperor Alexander,' he wrote, 'sees the danger that threatens Europe from the ambition of Bonaparte and I think he has only agreed to the [Erfurt] meeting in order to gain a little longer spell of outward repose.' More than ever Stein believed that the realization of his schemes was at hand.

Imagine, then, the consternation of the Prussian court when it learned of Prince William's capitulation and the publication of Stein's letter! The messenger bearing the dreadful news arrived late at night. The King was roused, Count Goltz was summoned to an audience. A few moments later he was back in the antechamber, pale and crushed. 'All is lost,' he told the appalled courtiers. Next morning Stein sent in his resignation.

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But King Frederick William was not the man to take decisions quickly even in the gravest crises. For the moment he refused to accept Stein's resignation; as though nothing had happened, he would let him continue, not only his legislative work but even the hazardous course of his foreign policy.

And now this policy became one of exasperation. First, Stein brought the King to the point of refusing to ratify the Convention that Prince William had signed. Then, when the King decided, in private and without consulting him, to ratify, the Prime Minister submitted a remarkable document in which the 'scrap of paper' theory is presented with unsurpassed frankness and eloquence alike. 'If your Majesty signs the treaty meaning to carry it out, the result will be . . . the impoverishment of the nation, resentment against the government and the complete subjection of the country to the evil will of the Emperor of the French. . . . If on the other hand your Majesty signs it, meaning to break it at the proper moment, at the moment of war with Austria, Your August Person will surely be employing a ruse to deal with a brutal and criminal force. Is only Napoleon to be allowed to use arbitrary force in place of justice and lies in place of truth?'¹

This theory he continued to put in practice. His tactics were to put Frederick William in presence of the *fait accompli*. Through Götzen, his representative in Silesia, he opened secret negotiations with the Austrians.² On his personal responsibility, he caused Vienna to be informed that

¹ The soldiers, however, it is only fair to say, did not share Stein's view at this moment. 'Our cause is just before God and the World, and the heart of Prussia is pure, her honour intact. The conclusion of a treaty with the intention of breaking it would be a stain on our arms that nothing could efface.' These noble words are taken from a letter written to Stein by Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Grolman with the intention of influencing the King against ratification. Yet had not these very men, a month earlier, advocated an alliance with France as a mask for quite other designs?

² 'Keep up your contact with the Austrians, and assure them on every opportunity that we want to help to save Germany, and that the rumours that the French circulate about our joining them are false.'

Prussia would engage her whole force as soon as Austria took the first decisive step towards a rupture with France. At this moment, then, there were two Prussian policies, the official and pacific policy of the King and the secret war policy of the Prime Minister. Count Finkenstein, representing Prussia, was utterly nonplussed.

And how did it come about that Napoleon himself tolerated such a situation? Why had he not officially demanded Stein's dismissal? Was it that he wished to judge the King of Prussia by his actions, without applying definite pressure? Or that he wanted no new complications on the eve of Erfurt? Or was it, quite simply, the fact that he had no accredited representative at Königsberg that prevented him from acting? Questions to which, for us, there are no answers.

But for all this inaction, Napoleon never for a moment forgot the author of the intercepted letter. The storm muttered in the depths, and at Erfurt, in a conversation with Goltz, it burst, so terrifically that the Prussian envoy dared not even report to his government the terms that Napoleon used in speaking of Stein.

A month later, on November 13th, having inflicted a defeat on the Spaniards, Napoleon alludes again to the Prussian Ministry in the bulletin announcing the capture of Burgos. 'It would have been a good thing if M. de Stein and other people who, in default of troops of the line that have failed to resist our eagles, contemplate the sublime expedient of the *levée en masse*, had witnessed the miseries that it produces and the slightness of the obstacle that this resource can create for regular troops.'

As a matter of fact, Napoleon was simply waiting for his opportunity. At the right moment he would settle accounts in a way that Stein could not evade. But how are we to account for the attitude of Frederick William in keeping his minister at such risks?

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At one moment, in October 1807, Stein had appeared to him as the saviour of the dynasty. Six months later the King still gave him his entire confidence, as shown by his letter of May 15th, 1808, couched in the most flattering terms, to Stein at Berlin: 'You will be giving us a pleasure by not delaying your return too long, especially as our financial means are coming to an end. I admire alike the courage, firmness and resignation that you display in all your negotiations, looking to a happy issue, as so many sacrifices that you make to the general interest, and I am aware what it costs you. — Frederick William.'

On Stein's return to Königsberg his relations with the King were closer than ever. Almost every evening he walked up the garden of the modest villa that the latter had rented at the gates of the town. But little by little the personality of the great minister had begun to irk the monarch. Stein himself was complacent, 'satisfied to see how much the King feared him', but no doubt Frederick William saw it rather differently. 'I have never liked the Minister,' he said to Saint-Marsan later (February 13th, 1810). 'I have always regarded him as an *exalté*. As a matter of fact he has turned everything upside down, and this is one of the principal causes of the present state of things in this country.' Might not one have expected that Stein's resignation would have been accepted with a sigh of relief? And it was again tendered a fortnight later, on October 8th.

But the King had to consider that the prestige of Prussia was involved, for after all the alliance proposal, the insincerity of which had thus been shown up, had been made in his name. He had to consider also the patriotic party, of which Stein was the revered chief, and which was so influential that a frontal attack might be dangerous. Would it not be prudent, therefore, to wait and see what Erfurt should produce, and to prepare public opinion gradually?

Public opinion, as a matter of fact, was changing of itself.

By his rudeness and want of consideration, Stein offended his entourage. Princess Radziwill, his firm friend and admirer, wrote: 'He has no knowledge of men, and no mistrust towards people, who manage to captivate him by professing noble sentiments.' Among the officials, the reduction of salaries that he had imposed created wide discontent. And even those who were fair-minded enough to see the necessity of the measure were irritated, says the Princess, 'by the intemperateness of his character, which often flares up violently against his best friends'.

The Prussian squirearchy, too, with its firm attachment to the Frederician tradition and its passionate jealousy for its own interests, regarded Stein more and more as their enemy. 'Their tireless hatred is the reply to the contempt that I have for them,' cried the minister in a moment of anger. The further the work of reform progressed and broadened, the more he appeared in their eyes as a revolutionary Jacobin of the worst kind, setting himself to destroy the social edifice. They were scandalized at his admitting the sons of mere artisans to the honour of wearing the officer's sword, which had been for generations the distinguishing mark of nobility. They feared the impending abolition of manorial jurisdiction and police, 'the dearest rights,' they said, 'of our estate'. And the project of national representation filled them with sheer terror. According to them, the 'democratic soldiers' who now surrounded the king were converts to the French Revolution and all its policy of destructiveness.

There was another group whose political opinions had always been opposed to Stein's. This was the Francophil party, the 'traitors' watched by the Tugendbund, in other words those who admired the Emperor's genius, mixed with the generals and officers of the Army of Occupation, and wished to see Prussia return to prosperity by way of membership of the Rhine Confederation. At Berlin these

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pacifist and international tendencies were highly fashionable, and not only Jewish society, the richest and most elegant in Berlin, but influential Prussian aristocrats like Prince Hatzfeldt shared them. So long as the King gave Stein his confidence and support, all this world had kept quiet. But now it appeared that Stein had put his Sovereign in a position of extreme embarrassment, that his imprudence had provoked the anger of Napoleon and so exposed Prussia to the danger of terrible reprisals. It was enough to rekindle every hate and to invite every impudence. The destiny of great men is ever the same — a check, a partial defeat, and the whole hostile pack hurls itself upon them.

By the end of September the first signs of a campaign against the Prime Minister were visible. A deputation, headed by Prince Hatzfeldt in person, waited upon the French General Saint Hilaire to dissociate itself from Stein, and the papers appearing in Berlin under the French censorship — *Vossische Zeitung* and *Telegraph* — vied with one another in invective against him. Prince Wittgenstein, to whom the famous letter had been addressed, disavowed his correspondent and wrote to him to say that if he received any further missives of the sort he 'would send them to the French authorities with the appropriate comment'.

Stein pretended to ignore these attacks, hoping still that the King would keep him at his post, and counting also on the influence of the Queen, the ardent patriot who had opened for him the way to power, and had written in November, 1807, 'If Stein is with us, it is a proof that God has not abandoned us.' And now this noble-hearted woman, even she, turned away from the dictator.

Louise's confidence in him had at the outset been far greater than her husband's. More clearly than any one she saw into the relation of the two men. 'All will go well,' she wrote, 'so long as Stein saves appearances and shows him-

self less great than he really is.' 'The essential thing is that discussions do not degenerate into disputes. A great deal of patience is needed. The King attaches so much importance to quiet and respectful forms. Hardenberg is unique in this respect. But Stein has on his side talent, energy and will-power.' She had been the first to note the intrigues that began to be set on foot against Stein during his absence in Berlin. 'It would be a good thing if you could return soon,' she wrote to the minister on May 1, 1808, 'they say that there is a nasty cabal here which is mining and mining.'

But in the course of the autumn, a change took place in Louise. A first difference arose between them over the nomination of a new royal tutor.

The minister, with entire lack of tact and suppleness, insisted on the nomination of his candidate. 'Stein kills me, he taxes me with being just a weak woman in this, which is very superficial,' wrote the poor lady. And then came the business of the intercepted letter, and the Queen saw that Stein 'is only fomenting agitation and revolt'.

Another incident brought about the definite alienation of the Queen; in this Louise showed herself very much a woman, and Stein displayed his complete incomprehension of the feminine mind. Alexander, in passing through Königsberg, had invited the royal pair to visit him at St. Petersburg. The Queen was delighted with the project; after all the miseries she had gone through, she would once more participate in brilliant fêtes and display her beautiful dresses and her diadems before Alexander and his court. She little thought what a disappointment the visit was destined to prove, and how, behind the cold splendours of solemn receptions and military parades, she was to find no longer the Alexander of romantic little German towns, but a haughty, distant and indifferent Tsar, with no eyes for any woman but his fair mistress Madame Narishkin. At the moment, she was all for the idea, and — here was the

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austere minister putting a formal veto on it. Stein declared that the cost of the journey would be out of all proportion in the lamentable condition of Prussian finances, and that, moreover, it would be injudicious to make a display of friendship towards Napoleon's ally before all Europe. Vexed by this lesson in administrative wisdom, Queen Louise lent an attentive ear to the advice of two diplomats, M. de Schladen, Prussian Minister at St. Petersburg, and M. de Nagler, both of whom were in favour of the journey and spared no pains to embroil the Queen with their chief.¹

From the beginning of November, Frederick William saw that his prudent tactics had succeeded, and that his Prime Minister was more and more isolated. It was at this moment that Count von Voss, whom Stein had entrusted with the continuation of the *pourparlers* with the French authorities at Berlin, decided to betray his protector and wrote officially to the King to the effect that the dismissal of the minister was absolutely necessary, unless he was prepared to enter into grave conflict with France. On November 10th Hardenberg, urgently summoned from his exile at Riga, had a secret interview with the King and Queen. This meeting, wrapped in mystery, took place in the open country some distance from Königsberg. Hardenberg notwithstanding his tried friendship for Stein, agreed that his dismissal was now inevitable.

Some days later, November 24th, Stein was led to submit his resignation once more, and this time it was accepted, with some plain speaking. The King wrote him a polite letter of farewell with the usual compliments, and Stein's dictatorship, with its glories and vicissitudes, was over.

For months the Eagle had been watching for the moment to swoop on his prey. The moment had come, and he would use it. He was in Spain when the news of Stein's fall

¹ Princess Louise Radziwill, *Mémoires*, p. 297.

came, and it was from Madrid that he issued the famous and unique edict in which 'The man Stein' (*le nommé Stein*) was declared 'Enemy of France and of the Confederation of the Rhine'. His property, whether in France or in Confederation territory, was to be sequestered, the Emperor proclaimed, and 'the said Stein is to be arrested wherever he can be reached by our troops or those of Our Allies'.

This time the Emperor meant to see his orders executed. The same day, December 16th, 1808, he sent Champagny formal instructions: 'Send the attached order to all my ministers with the princes of the Confederation of the Rhine letting them know that *le sieur* Stein is still working up, with English aid, harebrained plots against the Confederation. . . . Speak strongly about it to the Prussian Minister in Paris, and write to my Consul at Königsberg to tell him to see the King and let it be understood that if my troops catch Stein he will be shot.'

It was a task of uncommon delicacy that Napoleon thus imposed on his Foreign Minister. The Emperor was all-powerful doubtless, but Champagny was well aware how dangerous it would be to rouse European opinion by a conspicuous violation of the Law of Nations — the case of the Duc d'Enghien was proof enough. Only yesterday Prime Minister and to-day a retired dignitary residing in a State with which France was at peace, the man whom Napoleon was pleased to call '*le nommé Stein*' could only be brought under the Imperial jurisdiction by a wholly high-handed act. In these conditions Champagny's note to Brockhausen, the Prussian Minister — published here for the first time — must be held to be a veritable *tour de force* of dialectic:

'Monsieur, when His Imperial and Royal Majesty became aware for the first time of M. de Stein's seditious manœuvres, he contented himself with making public the material proofs that had been obtained of them. If

His Majesty desired that he should be removed from the councils of Prussia, it was because he was keenly concerned that the good understanding happily re-established between the two States should be maintained inviolate, of which he would not feel assured if the King had consented to keep near his person, and in so high a position, a man so willing and so likely to disturb that understanding. It was natural, further, to suppose — as His Majesty did suppose — that the revelation of these criminal intrigues would be sufficient to stop them, that shame at least, if not repentance, would keep M. de Stein in order henceforward, and the indulgence displayed towards him would also be not without fruit. But His Majesty holds proofs not less indisputable than the first, that M. de Stein has never ceased to be in communication with the English, that in agreement with them he flatters himself that he can again divide France and Prussia, and that he is working ardently to rouse troubles in the Confederated States of the Rhine, although he was born in one of those and his relatives and his possessions are in them. If His Imperial and Royal Majesty had been able to see in him merely a personal enemy, he would have despised him, but he has been forced to see in him a man who, traitor to his own country, enemy to the France governed by His Majesty and the Rhine Confederation protected by him, manufacturer of sedition and discord, has *put himself outside the Law of Nations* and the protection of the laws of all civilized countries. His Majesty has therefore been compelled to take such measures against him as will effectively stop his plots and will deter all who might be tempted to imitate him. *Prussia, too, cannot but treat him as an enemy*, one who wished to compromise and, so far as it lay in his power to do so, has compromised her tranquillity and repose. But perhaps he is no longer within Prussian territory, and the only thing still in the King's power is to forbid him

re-entry for ever. If on the contrary he is still in Prussia, his presence not merely in the capital but in any part of the country, would be an obstacle to the presence in Berlin of the Minister whom His Imperial and Royal Majesty proposes to send thither. The departure of this Minister will consequently be suspended until it is certain that M. de Stein is no longer in any States of the Confederation (sic) of His Majesty the King of Prussia, and I have received express orders so to inform Your Excellency.

‘His Majesty hopes even, and the hope is founded on the sentiments which have been expressed by H.M. the King of Prussia and of the sincerity of which he is entirely convinced, that the Monarch, if M. de Stein is still in his power, will not consider his own justice satisfied by exiling him for ever from his States, but that (as I am instructed to ask through Your Excellency) he will not refuse to arrest M. de Stein, who is not less guilty towards his own state than towards the Emperor, and so to give more direct satisfaction to the powers whom M. de Stein has so grievously offended.’¹

After the events of September Brockhausen’s powers of resistance were completely broken. He accepted the French Minister’s note without protest. ‘I have asked the Prussian Minister for Stein’s arrest,’ reported Champagny to the Emperor under date September 28th. ‘I have treated Stein as an isolated being who has put himself outside the Law of Nations by his machinations against the tranquillity of several Governments, and, as I accused neither Prussia nor its King, the way was eased for M. de Brockhausen to accept the note; he has promised to send a courier with it to his Court.’

But that was not all — the French representatives in Germany had also to be informed, and in particular M. de

¹ Champagny to Brockhausen, December 27th, 1808 (Archives of Min. Foreign Affairs, Prussia 242, No. 53)

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Marsan had to be warned before he should take up his new post at Berlin. Champagny, therefore, wrote without delay to the French diplomats accredited to the little Courts of the Rhine Confederation and to Clérambault, French consul at Königsberg. The draft of the last letter, preserved in the Quai d'Orsay archives, contains one curious passage, 'You will let it be understood that if he (Stein) is seized by His Majesty's troops he will suffer the fate everywhere meted out to traitors. If he is arrested in Prussia you will advise me at once.'¹ This undisguised threat to shoot Stein, however, appeared too strong for the prudent Champagny, and it was omitted from the final text.

The extreme importance that the French Government attached to the whole affair may be judged from the minute care taken by Champagny in drafting the instructions sent to Saint-Marsan. Every eventuality is covered. 'His Majesty's intention,' writes the Minister, 'is that you should not go to Berlin unless M. de Stein has been removed from that capital and from the whole of Prussia. I have warned M. de Brockhausen of this here. You will, therefore, M. le Ministre, if (as I suppose) you are still at Leipzig, on receipt of this letter, remain in that town and await further instructions. You will even return thither if you are nearer the Prussian frontier. But if you are already in Berlin, let me know, and if your letters of credit have not yet been presented, defer this, stating at the same time the reasons which oblige you to do so. If they have already been presented, you are to ask for an interview with Count Goltz, to whom you will communicate the information we have acquired as to M. de Stein's activities, and you will demand that if he has left the country, Prussia shall, conformably to the assurances given by the Prussian Court, be for ever closed to him, while if he is still within the

¹ Champagny to Clérambault, December 26th, 1808, *ibid.*

King's States his person shall be seized.¹ You will please inform me, as promptly as possible, of all that you may do under these different hypotheses."²

The meshes of the net were thus closing round the disgraced minister. Stein had handed over his functions, and written his 'political testament', in which he prided himself on having given Prussia a new race of men who were free and knew their duty. He had left Königsberg and had gone to Berlin to see his family there. In case the French authorities meant to try a *coup de main* on him he was, therefore, defenceless; nothing was simpler than to arrest him. But this would depend on the attitude that Saint-Marsan would take up.

This diplomat left his old post at Turin on December 4th, and arrived at Berlin on the 27th, without having been warned at all. The despatches that he found there were dated November 27th, and some days would thus go by before the arrival of those relating to Stein. His chief preoccupation was the absence of the Court, for, rid of Stein, the King and Queen had hastened to set out for St. Petersburg. 'I do not know if I ought to be sorry to be here,' Saint-Marsan wrote to Champagny the day of his arrival, but having heard at the frontier that the return of the Court was delayed, I thought I could not stop there without verifying the stories that busybodies are spreading abroad . . . I had not thought it right to delay my departure from Turin, in view of what Your Excellency and His Majesty himself had said to me.'

The orders of Napoleon, when they arrived at last, threw Saint-Marsan into a state of consternation. Imbued as he was with the ideas and traditions of the *ancien régime*, the

¹ The next passage, suppressed in the definitive text, runs as follows: 'You can even demand (but without too much insistence until you receive further orders) that Stein should be given up to the French authorities as a traitor and agent in British employ to embroil the two Courts.'

² Champagny to Saint-Marsan, December 26th, 1808 (Archives of Min. Foreign Affairs, Prussia 242, No. 4449).

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diplomat hesitated to make himself the instrument of an act of arbitrary violence. Unwilling to begin his mission with a spectacular stroke that could not but make him enemies, he looked for a way out, as is the habit in chancelleries. He made inquiries, found that Stein was, like himself, in the capital, and had recourse to the good offices of his colleague M. de Goldberg, the Dutch Minister, who undertook to warn Stein of what was in store and get him away quietly and without scandal.

So Stein was not shot, as Napoleon would perhaps have liked, but he had to go into exile without delay. 'A few hours more,' he wrote to Princess Marianne, the young wife of Prince William, 'and I shall leave the country to which I have devoted thirty years of my life. It has cost me my own loss and that of the domains that have belonged to my family for 675 years. Nevertheless, if my fall in the storm of the times is of service to my unhappy country I will joyfully endure it.'

On a fine winter's night Stein fled over the mountains of Bohemia. 'Nature was calm and solemn,' he writes in his memoirs. 'On such a night in such an atmosphere my spirit was prepared to reduce all human works however grand to their true scale. I thought involuntarily of Schleiermacher's last sermon, and the words of the Lord he quoted, "And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul".'¹

¹ Matthew x. 28.

CHAPTER XI

THE OUTLAW

DURING the winter of 1811-12 — when the famous ‘Comet of Napoleon’ was forewarning the European peoples of new calamities, new miseries — the peaceful citizens of the good city of Prague often watched a man of mature age, with powerful brow and aquiline nose, ascending with dignified steps the steep slope of the Hradčany, the ancient citadel of the Bohemian kings. From the top of the hill, the solitary man would survey the city with its medieval aspect as it lay spread below him, and plunge into long reverie. The Freiherr was dreaming of those Middle Ages that represented for him the best epoch of humanity, of the Reformation Wars that had stained Bohemia with blood, of the German Empire wherein for centuries his ancestors had served German greatness, and of the triumphs and trials of his own destiny.

Three years had passed since that night in the mountains when, in philosophic resignation, he had weighed the vanity of human things. Three long years in which he had drunk to the lees the bitterness of exile and inaction. The Austrian Emperor had received him with no enthusiasm whatever. The little town of Brünn was first assigned as his place of residence before he was permitted to remove to Prague, and he had been required, under threat of expulsion, to observe *une conduite modeste*. The Austrian police were always at his heels, seeing, in this man without a country, an unwanted guest and dangerous conspirator. His letters were opened by the famous ‘Cabinet Noir’ of Vienna, in the hope of finding traces of plots fomented by the secret societies that he had protected. For three long years his

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name, once in every mouth, was completely forgotten; and as far as the general public was concerned, it was as though he had ceased to exist. Even in Prague he was hardly known, mixing only with some families of the higher aristocracy, the Czernins, the Thuns, the Stadions.

From time to time, in strict secrecy, certain German patriots came to visit him who had been their chief and still remained in their eyes the patriarch of the church of the well-disposed. Hardenberg himself, who had resumed the government of Prussia after the brief interlude of the Dohna-Altenstein ministry, came to see him in his retreat and went away refreshed by the ever eloquent and courageous words of his predecessor. Pozzo di Borgo, that fearless agent of the anti-Napoleonic coalition, had not failed to make his acquaintance and they had passed hours together walking in the green valleys of Troppau, attended by the young Uvarov. The Russian listened greedily to 'the grave dialogue, the bursts of confidence, in which the greatest questions were each in turn taken up and argued out'. He was overcome with admiration for these two outlaws, 'whose heads were a prize for the first French second-lieutenant who could lay hands on them', and who yet spoke of the future with confidence and calm, unshakable conviction, while, not so far away, the French guns were rumbling along their road to Wagram battlefield.

But these conversations and consultations, needless to say, had no practical results. Events followed their course, and Stein, though observing them attentively, could not influence them. Inaction weighed on him more and more. 'It is unbearable,' he wrote, 'to waste one's powers in idleness and to leave unused what remains of one's vital energy while the wheels of destiny preserve their inexorable way.'

To fill time he devoted himself to historical studies, to writing essays, to invectives against 'that accursed race, light, frivolous and immoral, of the French, half tigers and

half monkeys'.¹ 'In no history,' he wrote, 'can there be found such immorality and degradation as in that of France; has not that been made evident in the Revolution, when the government had disclosed its weakness and the nation was free to show its true character without fear of punishment?' He excepted from this sweeping condemnation only the few who had given themselves wholly to the service of religion and the idea of chivalry — Coligny, the Huguenot La Noue, Châtillon, Rohan, Fénelon, the Maid of Orleans, Bertrand du Guesclin, Godfrey of Bouillon.

During the first months of his exile, the situation was such that he could still cherish some hope. On March 27th, 1809, the Emperor Francis had hurled at Napoleon the declaration of war for which the German patriots were so impatiently waiting. 'Germany will be saved by herself,' Stein had exclaimed when he read the grandiloquent manifesto of Archduke Charles. Was not all that Stein had been preparing in the last months of his ministry about to be realized? Already Stein saw the English landing in North Germany, a popular army springing from the ground hoisting the old imperial colours and taking 'Death to Napoleon Bonaparte' for motto. But alas! except for the national uprising in Tirol, nothing of this happened. England, in accordance with her egoistic policy, disembarked her troops in the estuary of the Scheldt² and not on German territory. The Emperor Francis had not proclaimed the *levée en masse*, and in any case Germany had not been able to unite.³ In vain Prince William of Orange, descendant of the Norman Dukes and General in the Austrian service, had visited Königsberg, and

¹ Letter to Countess Brühl, March 7th, 1811.

² 'Europe's liberty has taken refuge under your colours. Your victories will break her chains!'

³ The ill-fated Walcheren expedition. — TRANSLATOR.

⁴ Three small-scale risings did take place in Germany — that of the Hanoverian Dörnberg, that of 'Brunswick's fated chieftain' and that of the Prussian Major Schill. All failed. — TRANSLATOR.

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sought to bring Frederick William into the coalition. Deprived of the stimulating energy of his great minister, the King had lapsed into his former weakness and had once more betrayed the common cause. Austria was defeated at Eckmühl, reacted at Aspern, but was finally beaten at Wagram, and in token of submission had offered Napoleon the hand of an archduchess. Prussia meantime had become definitely a vassal-ally of France. 'It is terrible,' wrote Stein, 'that such efforts, such sacrifices and a devotion so generous and noble in all classes and all countries of the Austrian Monarchy have not brought more favourable results.' 'And they have let Hofer¹ be murdered, one more martyr to the good cause,' he cried out in pain to Pozzo.

Thenceforth no illusion was possible. 'Prussia will perish, unregretted and inglorious,' he prophesied in an access of despair. 'And it will be regarded as fortunate for Europe that a power which has shaken Europe by its ambition, and disquieted it by its trickiness, that has done its duty neither to itself nor to the European community, should at last cease to exist.' From invective against the French he turns to pour scorn on the squirearchy and the rest of the inhabitants of the sandy steppes of Prussia — 'men without heart or education, fit only to be corporals and clerks'.

Now indeed the Napoleonic empire seemed to be established on unshakable foundations. At the instigation of her husband, whose exile she bravely shared, Madame vom Stein humbled herself so far as to ask the Master of the World to put an end to the sequestration of his lands in Nassau and Silesia in favour of their daughters. No reply was ever received.

At moments Stein thought of escaping from the too calm and too petty atmosphere in which he lived at Prague. He had a modest income, thanks to the pension that the

¹ Andreas Hofer, the Tirolese leader, shot at Mantua, February 10th, 1810. —
TRANSLATOR.

Prussian government honourably continued to pay him. He dreamed of making long journeys. 'If I were younger I would go to Cadiz¹ and cut half a dozen French throats; that would reconcile me to my lot.' Another day it was South America that tempted him, 'provided that those Spaniards succeed in creating there a new Empire on foundations of religion, morals and moderate monarchy', or again he would talk of the United States; 'to enjoy peace and independence, the best way would be to settle down in America, in Kentucky or Tennessee' — magnificent climate and soil, grand rivers, calm and security for a century. There are many Germans there; the capital of Kentucky is called Frankfort.'

But were not these plans, even, illusions? Was not his destiny already fulfilled? More and more he meditated on death.

On May 9th, 1812, a carriage with the arms of Hesse Philippsthal rattled into the market-place of Prague. Its occupant was the young Prince Ernest, come from distant Russia on an ultra-secret mission. He handed to Stein an autograph letter from the Tsar:

'Monsieur, the esteem that I have for you has not been altered by the events that have removed you from the helm of power,' wrote the Autocrat of All the Russians. 'It is the energy of your character and your eminent talents that have won it for you. The decisive circumstances of the moment' ought to rouse every right thinking person, every friend of humanity and liberal ideas. They must be saved from the barbarism and enslavement that are making ready to swallow them up. Napoleon means to complete the enslavement of Europe, and to do so he has to strike Russia down. Preparations to resist have been in hand for

¹ Then under siege by the French. — TRANSLATOR.

² In 1809 these States were still in the pioneer stage. — TRANSLATOR.

³ In April and May Napoleon was massing his army for the invasion of Russia. — TRANSLATOR.

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a long time, and the most energetic means (*sic*) have been assembled for it.

‘Every friend of virtue, every human being who is animated by the sentiment of independence and love of humanity is interested in the success of this struggle. You, Monsieur le Baron, who have been so conspicuous and brilliant amongst them, cannot but wish to help make a success of those efforts that are to be made in the North for triumph over the invasive despotism of Napoleon.

‘I invite you in the most pressing way to let me have your views, either in writing through safe channels, or verbally by coming to join me at Vilna. Count Lieven will provide you with an entry passport. Your presence in Bohemia, so to say behind the French army’s back, might indeed be very useful. But the weakness of Austria, which almost certainly ranges her under the French colours, might compromise your safety, or at any rate the security of your correspondence. I beg you then to reflect carefully on the importance of all these circumstances and to choose the course that seems to you most useful to the great cause to which we both belong. I need not assure you that you will be welcomed in Russia with open arms; the sincere friendship which I bear you will be sufficient guarantee of that. Alexander. St. Petersburg, April 8th 1812.’

To Stein the imperial message must have seemed providential, not to say miraculous. He had always, as we know, been a convinced supporter of the ‘Russian orientation’. For many years he had had a fervent admiration for the Tsar. The unfortunate experiences of the last campaign had, however, chilled this enthusiasm somewhat. ‘Alexander’s weakness becomes manifest when we compare him with Peter the Great,’ he wrote while in exile. ‘The latter’s defeat at Narva stimulated him to new efforts, which had to be continued through many years but which ended in the consolidation of Russia’s greatness. But as to Alexander,

the battles of Austerlitz and Friedland were enough to dissipate the mist of humanitarianism in which he was wrapped and to paralyse the little energy that he displayed from time to time.' In Alexander he now saw 'a weak, sensual and changeable prince, intimidated by numerous checks, governing a country whose population was scattered, mostly slaves, and as to the rest, the higher strata of society, permeated with the French influence, the most demoralizing and pernicious of all'.

Nevertheless it had been enough for Stein to hear that Alexander was preparing for war afresh for all his old sympathies to revive. He had already written to his old friend Count Münster, Hanoverian minister at the Court of St. James to propose that he should be attached to the British Mission which was shortly to proceed to the Tsar's headquarters. 'Alexander showed his confidence in me in 1807 by wishing me to enter his service. I have many acquaintances in Russia. I only require passports and the reimbursement of the expenses of the move. When the war is successfully over I shall return here, otherwise I am ready to meet my end there.'

This proposal to Münster was only one more of the products of his unquiet imagination and lack of occupation, like the half-fantastic notion of America. But lo! the dream becomes a reality. The letter to Münster was dated April 19th, and the Tsar had answered it unawares ten days earlier. 'The success of the war appeared doubtful,' wrote Stein later, 'the risks considerable. But it was a matter of helping the Cause to which I had devoted my previous life, all my aspirations. I could not hesitate for a moment.'

He replied to Alexander at once in the following terms: 'The call that Your Imperial Majesty has deigned to make to me to join your standard, which is that of honour and true glory, has reached me. I obey it.' Four days later he quitted Prague.

CHAPTER XII

CONSPIRACY AT ST. PETERSBURG

By June 1812 the long and laborious negotiations between Napoleon and Alexander had reached their decisive phase. The Emperor of Russia had for some time been at Vilna, close to the frontier. Rumours of war circulated, anxiety increased at headquarters.

The arrival of Stein at Vilna on June 10th does not appear to have evoked any particular movement, either of curiosity or of sympathy. 'Alexander was now surrounded by a mixed crowd of individuals who were dominated by hatred of Napoleon. There was a whole pack of Germans, such as Stein, Phull, etc.,' writes the Grand Duke Nikolai Mihailovich, his great-grand-nephew and an eminent historian, catching the distant echo of the animosities that were aroused in the Russian officers by the presence of this alien element about their sovereign on the eve of the decisive struggle. From the moment of his arrival Stein had formally declined Alexander's offers of high position, declaring that he would confine himself to the role of semi-official adviser for German affairs. But that did not suffice to disarm jealousies, for it was only too evident that he would enjoy free access to the Russian sovereign and, like the other Germans, would exercise an influence that Alexander did not permit to his own subjects. Years later, in Nicholas I's reign, General Yermolov (who as a young officer had served in these wars) replied to his sovereign's offer, that he should name his own reward for an act of bravery, with the words, 'Sire, make me a German.'

But one man at least did not underrate the significance

of Stein's arrival in Russia, and that was Napoleon. This man whom he had struck off the rolls of European society, whom he had exiled, hunted and finally relegated to complete obscurity, reappears at the elbow of his most powerful adversary! Finding his will thus startlingly crossed, the Emperor seems to have felt a veritable tremor of anguish. Otherwise it is difficult to explain the unbridled violence with which he attacked Stein in his celebrated interview with the Tsar's envoy Balakhov. The friendship of Stein and Alexander oppressed him like a nightmare. Four times he returned to his fixed idea. He spoke of Stein during the formal audience, at the table, and again after the dinner. 'Why is the Tsar not ashamed to have near him such a vile creature? An Armfelt, a Bennigsen . . . a Stein, expelled from his country as a rascal, an evil-disposed outlaw with a price on his head? . . . How can we, we who truly love Alexander, hear without being disgusted that Armfelt and Stein, people who are ready to bowstring him, enter his cabinet freely and discuss things with him *tête-à-tête*. Tell me, has Stein dined with Alexander . . . how dare they place a Stein at the table of an Emperor of Russia; even if it suited the Emperor Alexander to listen to him, he ought not to have had him at his table. . . . Has he brought himself to believe that Stein is attached to him? Angels and devils ought never to find themselves together.' And, concluding this extraordinary diatribe, 'After all, I am not angry with Alexander about this war. A war the more is a triumph the more for me, and in any case to make war is the right of crowned heads. But it must be made in a decent, noble and elevated way. Why admit a Stein to his society? . . . Tell the Emperor Alexander that as he is collecting round him all my personal enemies, I can only suppose that he wishes to insult me personally and I must therefore do so likewise. I shall expel from Germany all his Württemberg, Baden and Weimar



The Emperor 'Alexander I of Russia'
(Old German colour print)

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relatives . . . let him prepare a refuge for them in Russia.'¹

Further, to make it quite clear that these were not idle words flung out in the course of conversation, Napoleon made a point of fixing them in an official document. Soon after the Balakhov interview on July 1st, he addressed a letter to the Tsar in which he declared that the removal of those of Alexander's advisers who were animated by hatred of France (meaning Armfelt and Stein in particular) must precede any peace negotiation. Now, in thus giving open vent to his rage against Stein, Napoleon committed a grave psychological error. All sorts of things might be said about the proscribed statesman — hatred of France, political recklessness, possibly even treachery. But this did not authorize his being treated as a vile creature, a rascal, a mercenary or an assassin. Stein was a scion of a great house, and his Reichsfreiherr rank made him the equal of crowned heads. He was a man of high culture and finished education and had been Prime Minister of a great European State. In lecturing Alexander for demeaning himself by admitting Stein to intimacy, Napoleon was simply impossible.

But Napoleon was mistaken about Alexander too. In one of his numerous conversations with Caulaincourt he characterized the Tsar in a way that literally astonishes us. 'Alexander would better suit the Parisians, he is the King who would please the French. He is too liberal, too popular for his Russians. . . . He is a conscientious citizen, not a Prince.'²

'A Greek of the Late Empire,' he said on another occasion, and this description, though manifestly untrue, has had its vogue. In reality, Alexander had nothing in him either of the subtle knave of the Byzantine sort or of the ideal prince for Paris. A true product of the misty air of St. Petersburg,

¹ The full details of their conversation is to be found in Tatischev's *Alexander 1er et Napoléon*.

² Caulaincourt, *Mémoires*, II. 327.

this grandson of Catherine the Great was a man profoundly imbued with the importance of his role as sovereign, but by temperament dreamy, undecided and prone to a cloudy mysticism. The 'Crowned Hamlet's' bendings and swayings were the result, not of astuteness, but of lack of real energy.

Still, if Napoleon fundamentally misunderstood the characters of both his great adversaries, he intuitively realized the danger of their combination. It would have been difficult, indeed, to find a happier one, for Stein supplied precisely what the Tsar lacked, namely indomitable energy.

Stein's judgments of Alexander in his first days in Russia had little in common with the flung-out epigrams of Napoleon. 'His physique is agreeable,' he wrote, 'his features regular and delicate, his attitude just what it should be. Owing to his deafness, he habitually bends his head to the left, but this is not displeasing. The essential feature of his character is benevolence, amiability, desire to make men nobler and happier. . . . But he lacks force of character and firmness to persevere, to break down obstacles and to bend opponents to his will. Benevolence degenerates into weakness, and he is often obliged to resort to ruse to obtain his ends.¹ . . . In all the Emperor's entourage there is not one strong and wise man. If things go passably well, there will be firmness, but if they go ill, as in 1805 and 1807, then, notwithstanding all the brave words, we shall succumb.'²

The 'strong and wise man' had now appeared in the person of Stein. Henceforth he will keep by the weak autocrat's side and support him in the most difficult moments.

In spite of the great divergence of characters, there was something in Stein and in Alexander that brought them together. The Autocrat of All the Russians and the Baron

¹ Stein's *Journal*.

² Stein to Münster, September 25th, 1812.

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of the Empire alike tended to a certain political Romanticism. Both considered themselves as defenders of virtue and morals, as instruments chosen by Providence for the victory of good over evil. They were on the same ground, engaged in the same struggle against the 'Beast of the Apocalypse'. And Stein would see to it that the struggle was relentless.

From the moment of his arrival at Vilna, Stein was the Emperor's companion, one of the immediate entourage. Except for the British Admiral Bentinck, he alone of the foreigners was admitted to the Imperial table — as we have seen, Napoleon was well informed. When the Tsar left Vilna, after the declaration of war, he was accompanied only by Kuchubei, his childhood's friend, and by Stein.

Some weeks later Stein was an eyewitness of the extraordinary welcome with which the population of the ancient capital received their Tsar. Russia was passing through one of the grandest moments of her history — the one moment, perhaps, in all the Romanov reigns when the nation's heartbeat was truly in unison with the sovereign's. 'One would say, Baron, that you have the art of divination in choosing this moment for your visit,' wrote Kuchubei. 'You will see this capital at its splendidest. . . . You will see what sacrifices we are prepared to make, and for a man who thinks and feels as you do it will all be very gratifying.' And indeed those Moscow days made an unforgettable impression on him. Often in his old age he would call up the memory of 'that delirious enthusiasm, religious and national, that seized the people as they surrounded and almost worshipped their Emperor'. Russia, in fact, offered him the spectacle that he had looked for in vain in his own country — that of a dynasty and a nation united against the great captain who had dared to violate the soil of the fatherland.

'I am seeing the capital at a truly interesting moment,' Stein wrote to his wife on August 9th (as always, in French). 'The Emperor, having gone there to push the national arming with greater vigour and on the largest scale, was received with the most moving expressions of the liveliest attachment on the part of all classes of the citizens. The nobility has offered to arm every tenth man at its own expense and there will be an enormous mass to oppose the progress of the foreign invasion.' The description he gives her of Moscow is picturesque, and all the more interesting as he was perhaps the last foreign observer to see the old city before it was burned. 'This is a most remarkable place, rather a group of several towns than a single city. It offers a number of edifices in the most diverse styles, superb hotels [i.e. nobles' palaces], wooden houses, buildings in the bad style of the Late Roman Empire with oriental admixture, and others in the best manner of modern¹ architecture. The greater number of these larger buildings are surrounded by gardens, for instance the area of the Rasumovski garden is forty-two arpents [fifty-three acres about]. The population is very considerable, 370,000 souls, it is very active and mobile. There is much movement in the streets and especially in the great squares where the shops of the merchants are. . . . Most of the aristocracy possess country houses in the neighbourhood, and some of them are very fine; thus Petrovski, belonging to Count Leo Rasumovski, is remarkable for the beauty of the château and gardens; Gorenki, owned by Alexei Rasumovski, for its great botanical gardens and an orangery valued at 500,000 roubles, and there are others that I have not yet seen.'

Two months later, nothing remained of these splendours. 'All these superb hotels, these fine country houses have

¹ i.e. Western Classicist. To-day the 'Byzantine-Oriental, buildings that he despises are Moscow's most valued treasures'. — TRANSLATOR.

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been destroyed,' Stein writes after the fall of Moscow (October 15th). 'The beautiful Gorenki where I stayed for some days, with its superb hothouses, is destroyed, and its owner Count Rasumovski has lost over three million roubles. Count Orlov's hotel has been burnt. These losses are bravely borne. The only thought is of fighting on, and of vengeance.'

By this time Stein was already at St. Petersburg, working up on the banks of the Neva his vast anti-Napoleonic conspiracy.

During the two centuries of its existence St. Petersburg has always been an outpost of Germanism. In 1914, on the eve of the Great War, there were still three or four German schools and tens of thousands of workmen and traders from the German lands, not to mention the innumerable functionaries and officers of Baltic origins who managed to combine fidelity to the German civilization and Lutheran faith with loyal devotion to their Russian sovereign.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century this was infinitely more so than in the twentieth. St. Petersburg was then, according to a companion of Stein, the headquarters of the adventurers of all Europe. Bearers of high-sounding titles to which they may or may not have had a claim, they came thither to seek their fortunes, ready at the same time to make off to Bucharest, Constantinople, or Smyrna if unsuccessful. But there were men of merit enjoying the medieval Russian hospitality as well as these rolling stones. In both categories, Germans were in the majority. There was, for instance, a certain Lockn-Taxis who (for no valid reason) got himself made a baron, major, and knight of the Order of Merit, and who is found some years later as a colonel in the Egyptian army of Mehemet Ali. But there was also Klinger, the friend of Goethe's

youth and author of the famous drama *Sturm und Drang* which has given its name to a whole great school of literature — now sobered down as a Russian General and Director of the Cadet School. There was the famous astronomer Schubert; Beck, Anstett and Nesselrode (the future Chancellor) in the Foreign Office; Severin the banker, Doctor Trinius, and numberless young Prussian aristocrats such as Count Dohna, Alvensleben, Von der Goltz, who had left the King of Prussia's standard for that of the Tsar.

The rallying point of all this German colony was the drawing-room of Duchess Antonia of Württemberg, born a Princess of Saxe-Coburg and sister to the Leopold who was to be the first King of the Belgians. While her husband was fighting against Napoleon at the head of one of the Russian armies, the young Princess busied herself in keeping up the war spirit in Petersburg society. The house was nothing less than a political club, a German enclave on Slav soil. The fair Empress Elisabeth, herself a German, appeared there sometimes incognito.¹

The unchallenged leader of this powerful Germanophile party was the Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna, born princess of Württemberg. Energetic and obstinate, of commanding presence, she fiercely hated the 'Corsican upstart', and the project of a marriage between Napoleon and one of her daughters had struck her as almost insulting. Her influence over the Tsar and the affairs of government was considerable, though not systematically applied.

In all these circles Stein was received with open arms. As to his ideas, he was preaching to the converted. The Dowager Empress was generous in the extreme, and he

¹ One day in Stein's presence she had a long conversation with Jubile, a former leader of the Tirolese insurgents and friend of Hofer. The tough mountaineer received such a shock when, later in the evening, he learned the identity of his august questioner that he went to bed for three days. He had taken her for 'just a court girl'.

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became a frequent visitor to her château of Pavlovsk, which he thought was furnished 'with infinite taste'. He had his place of honour, too, in the salon of Princess Antonia. In this wise he found himself possessed of a master-key to the real Russian circles, where he proceeded to spread his ideas, as a preliminary to implanting them securely in the Tsar himself.

In a few weeks Stein had conquered all the higher society of St. Petersburg. The man whom Napoleon treated as a vile and vicious rascal was apotheosized by the whole Russian aristocracy. Here, as of old in Königsberg, he subjugated all around him by the force of his personality, the ardour of his convictions and the fire of his eloquence. Semi-official Ambassador of patriot Germany, he held his head high as he moved 'like a Sultan' in the princely salons by the Neva.

He had arrived there during the good weather. On August 16th he wrote to his wife: 'Most of society is at its country houses in the environs of the city. Among the prettiest is one that Count Orlov has on an island in the Neva that bears his name. The park and garden are vast and well kept. The climate preventing variety in the trees, glass is much used, and chestnuts and oaks are more carefully looked after than apricot and peach trees are with us. In winter they are covered with mats, straw, etc. . . . but their vegetation is poor. The tone of society is easy, but the conversation is not "gehaltvoll" (solid); late hours are kept — dinner at five, supper at ten . . . and you will be quite astonished to hear that yesterday I did not go home till eleven!'

It was at one of these country houses near St. Petersburg that Stein made the acquaintance of Madame de Staël — strange meeting of Necker's daughter with the 'enemy of France', exiles both, united by their common hatred of

Napoleon! 'He is a character out of Antiquity,' declared the famous traveller after talking with him. The baron, for his part, was at first far from being carried away. On August 15th he writes to his wife: 'Madame de Staël arrived yesterday. She seems to be a good sort (*elle a l'air d'une bonne personne*) and quite unaffected when she has decided not to make any effort to please. There is a certain negligence, a sort of *abandon* about her that accounts for many of her imprudences of conduct and speech. . . . Her face has no longer that look of the pure matron, she is wanting in feminine dignity, there is something vulgar and passionate in her eyes. . . . I think she will hardly be appreciated here, where there is no taste whatever for literature and the women are extremely indolent.' But by degrees he began to fall under her charm. He was greatly impressed by her reading of some passages of her work on Germany. 'Madame de Staël has read us a chapter on "Enthusiasm" which deeply moved me by their depth and nobility of feeling and the sublimity of the thought,' and he even copied out some passages of this chapter for his wife. He records the amiable reception she received from the two Empresses, and expresses sincere regret when she departs for Stockholm.

On the poet Ernst Moritz Arndt, who was with Stein as his secretary, she made a deep impression. 'She is neither young nor beautiful, but the open, truthful and affectionate expression of her countenance reflects so brilliant a mind, so complete an honesty, that her personality is invested with such an attraction that I am tempted to forget the Frenchwoman in her' — which, in the mouth of this passionate German patriot, is the supreme compliment. Madame de Staël herself, on the contrary, never forgot her ties with France, notwithstanding her equivocal situation, and she burst into tears — 'O the barbarians! O my Racine!' — when the Petersburg audience, by way of a

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nationalist demonstration, received *Phèdre* with hisses.¹

At the end of September, society returned to the capital and Stein was at once involved in the world of mundane doings. 'Social life here,' he tells his wife, 'is pretty varied, and there are plenty of houses where one can spend the evening. The ones which I most frequent are the houses of Kuchubei, Countess Tolstoi . . . Countess Orlov, Nesselrode's mother-in-law, Mme. Grigoriev, Princess Dolgoruki. . . . We stay till midnight. The society of Countess Orlov's house is the most varied and numerous; she has wit and amiability, and the changeableness of her humours makes her all the more piquant. There is a swarm of English here, in the train of their Ambassador, but I have not yet discovered anything very interesting amongst them.' He continues on September 29th: 'Mme. Orlov is a woman of pleasant and subtle mind; she is rather changeable although she prides herself on her constancy to friendships; she is not beautiful, rather ugly indeed, but it is not at all displeasing ugliness. Her house is the meeting place of nearly all the foreigners and of many residents, so there is plenty of movement in this society . . . Generally speaking, the ladies who thus keep open house have considerable influence, and the leading ones amongst them constitute a sort of social General Staff, in which it is useful to have friends; one needs something to hold on to and to protect one's self against people's tongues.'

One wonders, were these closing words intended to justify in the Baroness's eyes the worldly goings-on of her austere spouse, to forestall any nascent jealousy in her? For, in fact, Stein had found here, as elsewhere in the past, a zealous and fervent admirer, and on this occasion, separated as he was from his family, he 'played up'. Something resembling an idyll began to develop between him and

¹ May a translator also say that 'history repeats itself'? In 1916, Petrograd concert programmes printed Bach items as 'West-European Music of the XVIIIth century'.
— TRANSLATOR.

Countess Orlov. 'What a pity,' exclaimed our statesman, 'that a woman like that should be doomed to live and die in Russia!' Probably he thought, like his assistant Arndt, that the charming Countess, blue-eyed as a Teutonic Thusnelda, belonged of right to Germany. He had not expected to find in this remote Russia a civilization so refined or a society so agreeable. His astonishment was shared by Arndt. 'In observing the family of Count Kuchubei,' he wrote, 'with its modesty and simplicity, I always asked myself from what planet had they dropped into Russia, how could such noble plants have possibly grown on the banks of the Neva?'

This attractiveness of Russian society was made up of complex elements. 'There is prodigious luxury here,' wrote Stein. 'In the great houses you find fifteen to sixteen *valets de chambre*, as many more servants in the ante-chambers, and three to four cooks, without counting the underlings. The luxury of personal dress is very great. Some have ten, twenty shawls, ranging in cost from ten to four thousand roubles. . . . As people are both hospitable and great eaters, the expenses of the table are enormous.' 'They are very hospitable, and, even if grand dinners are few, it is understood that an invitation to a foreigner is an invitation once and for all, so that if I wished I need never dine at home . . . as indeed, I don't oftener than twice a week at most.' With this luxury went a patriarchal simplicity of manner. We find in Arndt's memoirs an amusing picture of a reception — dozens of sledges ranged in front of the doors of this or that magnificent palace, the horses protected from the cold by rugs and even furs, the coachmen and footmen in their heavy pelisses reposing indoors, lying about the spacious halls and the marble staircases, and the crowd of servants, cooks, dancing masters and guests perpetually stepping over them without disturbing their snores.

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In the glamour of these brilliant fêtes the march of events in the field seemed forgotten. But the fate of Moscow and the advance of French detachments towards St. Petersburg brought this *beau monde* back to realities.

The atmosphere of St. Petersburg suddenly darkened. 'Angry murmurs circulated in the capital,' says Countess Edling, maid of honour to the Empress Elizabeth, in her memoirs, 'the people were nervous and irritated. . . . The nobility openly blamed the Emperor for the disasters of the State, and one hardly dared defend him in public. . . . On September 15th, the anniversary of the Coronation, the Tsar's carriage passed through a vast crowd, whose mournful silence and irritated visages contrasted grimly with the festival that was being celebrated. I shall never in my life forget the moment when we went up the steps between two walls of people from whom not a single acclamation was heard.'

Naturally, these events gave new life to the pacifist and pro-Napoleonic tendencies of certain circles influential in Petersburg society. The Francophile party had been beheaded by the disgrace and exile of Speranski, that great statesman whose vast administrative reforms present more than one analogy with those that Stein had brought about in Prussia. But the old Count Rumiantsov still exercised his influence on the town and the court. This glorious relic of the age of Catherine, who had been put in charge of foreign affairs after the Tilsit interview, was still, notwithstanding present circumstances, a fervent admirer of Napoleon. A diplomat of the old school, vain, frivolous, 'talking nothing but flippancies from morning to night', he was inaccessible to the persuasiveness of the German party. 'His opinions,' wrote Stein, 'have a tendency towards the cloudy. They are half-truths issuing from an incomplete organ of vision. He always tries to make you guess or suppose more than he has said, and one leaves him feeling

uncertain and uncomfortable.' Nevertheless, Rumiantsov knew very well what he wanted. For him, the true future of Russia was in the East, her true interests on the Danube and the Black Sea, and in his eyes the participation of Russia in the quarrels of Europe, the struggle with France, could only appear as an ill-timed intermezzo.

Suddenly faced with these unforeseen obstacles, Stein had had to decide on his line of action quickly. At all costs he must neutralize the influence of Rumiantsov, who, though detested by the Germans and English, had the Tsar's ear still. He must at the same time give the support of his own personality to the Russian patriots who were for fighting to the bitter end. After six weeks' stay Stein had come to know the weaknesses of St. Petersburg society. 'Composed chiefly of courtiers and officials,' it was far less deeply attached to the native soil than that of Moscow. 'Vanity, ambition and cupidity,' he wrote, 'are the chief ingredients in its character. There are too many who are weak and slack and more interested in their property than in their honour. The brave and pious burgher spirit is wanting here.' Nothing shocked him so much as to see this elegant world surrounded, in the midst of a French war, with a crowd of actors, valets, cooks, merchants, etc., of French nationality.

In the event these Petersburg Russians, at the decisive hour of their country's history, did take their part in the patriotic movement that was inspiring the whole country. But assuredly Stein's attitude contributed something to this swift rally of the high society of the capital. His Russian friends were unquestionably deeply impressed by this conspicuous firmness in these dark days. His unshakable faith was an example to all around him. 'Courage, my friend! It is the only thing fitting a man in this world,' he said to Arndt on the evening when the news came of Napoleon's entry into Moscow: 'Who knows whether we

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may not have to move hundreds of leagues eastward, to Kazan or Astrakhan.¹ In the course of my life it has happened to me to lose my baggage three or four times already. But one loses one's life only once,' and in the true *condottiere* vein he added, 'anyway, we are going to drink to our luck.'

For the Emperor, always vacillating, always unsteadied by conflicting impulses, it was of the first importance that he should have at his side, in September 1812, a man of Stein's calibre. It has, indeed, been claimed by German historians that the Tsar's decision to reject all peace offers after the fall of Moscow was due to the direct influence of the 'outlaw'. This is certainly inexact and vastly exaggerated; it was only later, as we shall see, that Stein's counsels were to play a decisive part, and at the moment we are concerned with, the Tsar could rely on the will of an entire people without regard to the Petersburg opposition. 'A peace is, happily, impossible,' wrote the Empress Elisabeth to her mother on September 9th; 'the Emperor does not dream of it, and even if he did, he could not make it.' In fact, Alexander had only to let himself go with the patriotic tide in the nation. Nevertheless, it was all to the good that he had with him a man who besides being firm and courageous, could appreciate the situation impartially. 'We were not involved as the Russians were,' wrote the famous Clausewitz, who like so many Prussians was then serving in the Tsar's army, 'in the miseries of a wounded, suffering and mortally threatened country.' Casting his eagle's-eye over all Europe, coolly judging the chances of the opponents, Stein, like Clausewitz, could discern the first hints of possible success where a Russian courtier could well believe that all was already lost. And Alexander

¹ It was probably a careless reading of this passage in Arndt's memoirs that led the historian Waliszewski to assert that 'Stein took refuge at Orenburg' (*Alexander Ier*, Vol. II, p. 127).

never forgot the moral support that Stein brought him in the most tragic moment of his reign. Thenceforward he gave him his entire confidence — the more so as events were soon to justify the German patriot's optimism.

On October 27th Stein wrote to his wife: 'Moscow is retaken and Bennigsen has beaten Murat.¹ The captured eagles have arrived and the guns are saluting the victory.' From this moment the series of his messages to Germany is continuously triumphant. On November 8th: 'The splendid state of affairs in this country, which is due to the energy of the nation, the bravery of the army and the blindness of the Great Crocodile (*sic*), assures us of perfect peace in this capital, and allows us to cheer ourselves with the most flattering hopes that justice and happiness are coming back to our country and families about to be reunited. You will feel, *ma chère amie*, how sweet and consoling it is to let oneself hope, to see calm replacing continued suffering, persecution and losses of those seven years, and to come out of it all with honour and conscience intact.' On November 26th: 'We are all *in high spirits*² owing to the brilliant successes and the hopes that are promising us an extremely satisfactory future. I have now no doubt that I shall see you again under the happiest auspices. How the proverb, "Mighty is the God of the Russians",³ has verified itself in every way.' On December 7th: 'Our armies go from triumph to triumph, the future opens out the most splendid hopes, and for me the most satisfactory and consoling of these is that of finding myself reunited to you, *mon excellente amie*, and my children.'⁴

The game was won, Russia saved from invasion, the Grand Army in retreat towards the frontier. But what did

¹ Action of Vinkovo and French evacuation of Moscow, October 6-18. — TRANSLATOR.

² In English in the original.

³ It is not actually a proverb, but the historic exclamation of a defeated Tatar Khan as he fled from the battlefield.

⁴ All Stein's letters to his wife are written in French.

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the destinies of Russia signify for Stein? He could not but admire her valour, her heroic resistance, but at the bottom of his heart he remained completely alien to her. For him, what had always mattered, and continued to matter, was the fate of Germany. Would the liberation of his fatherland necessarily ensue from Napoleon's defeat in the snows of Russia? Nothing was less certain; it might even be guessed that the yoke of the oppressor would press more heavily than ever on the peoples ranged under his banner. The future depended primarily on Alexander and his armies. How far would they go on following up their success?

There were two moments in Stein's chequered career when he played a leading part in European history — first in 1808, when he laid the foundations of the power of modern Prussia, and secondly in 1812, when he brought the Emperor Alexander to the point of ordering his army forward over the Russian frontier.

This decision, which was to influence the history of the whole continent for a century, was not an easy one to take. No one could then foresee Leipzig, Waterloo, the capture of Paris, the grandiose train of the events of 1813, 1814, 1815. The Russian army had lost, through battle and the severities of winter, three-quarters of its effectives. Prussia, Austria, Bavaria, and the other German principalities were still allies or vassals of France — there had been 150,000 Germans in the Grand Army.¹ The greater part of the Russians themselves were flatly opposed to a continuation of the war and regarded embroilment in the affairs of Europe as dangerous and against their own country's interests.

In a letter to Münster dated November 14th, 1812, Stein gives a clear analysis of the situation. "The successes of the Russian army necessarily influence public opinion, and this manifests itself in several ways. Some hope that, now

¹ Nearly one-third of the whole. — TRANSLATOR.

that the enemy is repulsed, peace will be made and Europe left to its own devices. . . . Others desire the aggrandisement of the Empire, at least to the Vistula, and its supremacy over the Continent. Others again aim at re-establishing in Europe a political order based on justice and the true interests of the nations. It goes without saying that *this last party is the weakest.*'

Kutuzov, the great and victorious leader of the Russian armies, considered his task as ended when the immediate aims of the war had been achieved, just as Foch did in 1918. 'Sire, your vow has been fulfilled,' he wrote to the Tsar; 'there is not an enemy left on the soil of the fatherland. It remains for you to fulfil the second vow, to lay down your arms.' The opinion of the old soldier was shared even by patriots as devoted as Rostopchin, the burner of Moscow, and Shishkov, the head of the Old Russian party — not to mention the Chancellor Rumiantsov. Nesselrode himself, although pro-German, considered that it would be best to be content with moderate peace terms rather than hazard Russia's last reserves.

But, against them all, Alexander took the opposite decision. 'The war for the liberation of Europe from the French yoke was Alexander's own work, and his alone,' says the historian Schilder.¹ Categorical as it is, this assertion is inexact, for it omits to mention the preponderating influence of Stein at this moment. Never at any time in his reign did Alexander take a decision *proprio motu* without leaning on a will stronger than his own. 'You well know the Emperor's character,' Speranski had said once to Balakhov. 'All that he does he half does. He is too weak to rule and too strong to be ruled.' His friend Czartoryski had judged him in the same way: 'We are afraid of everything. We are incapable of taking any vigorous line.' Alexander had carried out the liberal policy of Novosiltzov,

¹ Schilder, *Alexandre Ier*, III, 137.

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Kuchubei and Stroganov, and later, the somewhat different one of Speranski. He had executed the will of the people in the dark days of Borodino and the burning of Moscow. And, in the sequel, he was to do the same for the reactionary policy of Arakcheev at home and of Metternich in the various congresses of the Holy Alliance. Thus, even if there were no conclusive documentary proofs to the contrary, psychological grounds alone would forbid us to suppose that his decision at this fateful moment was absolutely independent. But such proofs exist — and they are eloquent — in Stein's correspondence with Alexander, which discloses with all clarity the threads of the plot by which, from the moment of his arrival in Russia, the German statesman set himself to lead Alexander unconsciously beyond the self-regarding objects of Russian nationalism, by dazzling him with noble and glorious vistas and investing him in advance with the titles of 'Liberator of Europe' and 'Benefactor of Humanity'.

On June 18th, 1812, even before the actual declaration of war by France, he presented a long note examining the 'possibility of activating in favour of Russia the forces of Germany that are now at Napoleon's disposal'.

He set out to prove, first of all, the artificial character of the alliances that the German princes had been obliged, against their people's will, to conclude with victorious France. 'The spirit of the German population,' he wrote, 'is exasperated against the present order of things and its author; it sees its independence, its blood and its resources sacrificed to the interests of princes who had betrayed them in order to maintain their own precarious existence. It is oppressed by the foreign hordes that plague and insult it. It has to fight nations which are its natural friends, or which are in no hostile relation whatever towards it. All its institutions, its ancient usages are destroyed, and no trace remains of the happiness that this numerous and

civilized nation enjoyed twenty years ago. The nobility has been deprived of its privileges and of the brilliant openings that the Church and the Military orders gave. The conscription is applied with a severity that does not prevail even in France itself. The cultivator is crushed by taxation and billeting. Every sort of commerce is annihilated, or has become a matter of smuggling, and the factories are paralysed by the Continental System that is breaking the links that have been forming for three centuries with America. That continent had been regarded as one of the most powerful agents of civilization, for to it was due the increase of money in circulation and the multiplication of exchange goods and services. But a man blinded by ambition, aided by the cowardice of the princes whom he oppresses, breaks these relations, impoverishes Europe and thrusts her back into barbarism. Germany suffers above all the rest by this harsh order of things; a great part of the productions of her industry were consumed in America, and this source of national wealth is now entirely destroyed. Opinion is supervised by an uneasy, tyrannical and suspicious police, literature, correspondence, public lectures all being under its eye. Social confidence, the ties of friendship are broken and crossed, and in this huge country one sees nothing but an unhappy mass that can only rattle its chains, and a few wretches that are proud to wear them. Such a state of things, which rests only on force, which suppresses all wills and all opinions, can only last as long as this iron hand lasts.'

Could this exposition, so eloquent in spite of its defects of style, fail to convince the Tsar that the German nation was his natural ally, though enrolled under Napoleon's colours? It only remained to 'fortify and enhance these dispositions of spirit' by propaganda work in Germany, by 'circulating a secretly published gazette', by conferring distinctions on patriotic savants and writers, and, lastly,

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distributing among Napoleon's Westphalian, Tirolese and Illyrian troops subversive proclamations inciting them to desert their Grand Army.

The application of these propaganda methods (and how modern they seem!) would not fail, according to Stein, to produce immediate fruit. With the aid of enthusiastic patriots, the working of the enemy's rear services could be hampered, one of the most effective means being to carry off couriers going to France or maintaining communications in Germany. German deserters and prisoners of war could be formed into an auxiliary corps under officers of their respective nations. All this would only be the prelude to a general rising at the right moment, the signal for which might be 'a disembarkation in Pomerania or elsewhere'.

It was quite natural that Alexander should accept this scheme. Was it not a simple matter of Russia's own defence that Napoleon should be prevented from freely using the resources of Germany? Stein took good care not to mention the fact that in calling the German people to his support, Alexander would place himself under moral obligations towards Germany, and so would insensibly be drawn into the cogwheels of European affairs.

The unsuspecting autocrat adopted Stein's projects immediately war was declared. By the sovereign's orders a 'German Committee' was formed at St. Petersburg, under the presidency of the Duke of Oldenburg. Before long this old man of 'cold, limited and mean ideas', hostile to any popular rising in Germany and chiefly distinguished by his knowledge of the names, titles, and genealogies of the German princes — 'a veritable dossier from the old Tribunal of the Empire' — gave place to Stein himself. He was given devoted, influential helpers, Count Kuchubei, the emperor's friend, and Count Lieven, the diplomat, whose young and charming wife — the same who was to be

Guizot's friend and queen of the Paris salons¹ — lent him the solid support of her determined Francophobia. Relations were opened with a Councillor Gruner, a former director of the Prussian police, who was entrusted with the creation of a secret network which was to spread disorder behind the French and spy upon their movements. A German Legion was formed under Colonel Arentschild. Arndt was set to work to draw up proclamations and pamphlets. Stein himself, with Alexander's permission, corresponded with England through his friend Count Münster, with a view to renewing diplomatic relations between Russia and the United Kingdom and bringing about a landing of British and Swedish troops in North Germany.

But the practical results of all this feverish activity were, it must be admitted, disappointing enough. Gruner, who was to be the chief agent of the conspiracy, was arrested by the Austrian police — at the instance of Frederick William's own government, who denounced him to Vienna as a dangerous Jacobin!² There was no Swedish landing, and the British likewise abstained from intervention of any sort, although Stein tried to tempt them by suggesting that they would thereby acquire 'a preponderating voice in the settlement of German affairs'. The recruitment of the German Legion met with unforeseen difficulties; the desertions that had been reckoned upon were not numerous, the Russian troops found it difficult to distinguish between French and Rhenish prisoners and the climate took toll of all nationalities indifferently. Out of 566 men enrolled for the German Legion at Podolsk, 166 only arrived at Pskov, where the unit was being formed; and

¹ This curious page of Madame de Lieven's life is passed over in silence by her biographer, E. Daudet.

² In Gruner's correspondence the police believed they had found indications of a revival of Tugendbund activities. But he explained that these had no reference to the old league; according to him, use had simply been made of the famous name to secure new adherents.

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of 4,200 legionaries sent from Kiev, only 381 reached their destination. The strength of the Legion never exceeded 7000 in all. Stein himself was obliged to recognize that a spirit of petty detail, pedantry and fussiness had prevailed in the formation of this corps, resulting in 'slowness, indecision in plans, relaxation of discipline that reduces all the well-disposed to despair'.

But all this was after all a detail. The essential point, Alexander's adhesion to the principle of collaboration between Russia and Germany, had been gained, and the German statesman had only to keep up his wily tactics till the Tsar should definitely recognize Germany's cause as his own. These discussions were as secret as they were frequent, but an attentive study of the memoirs presented by Stein at this period enables us to penetrate the mystery and grasp his stratagem.

On September 18th, the morrow of Borodino, when no one could yet foresee the issue of the sanguinary struggle, Stein submitted a remarkable memorandum on the future constitution of Germany. This historic document, to which we shall again refer, opens with the clear-cut phrase, 'The fate of the armies will decide that of Germany'. He could hardly have said more plainly that, for him, what was at stake under the walls of Moscow was *Germany's* future.

When Napoleon's retreat definitely set in, Stein unmasked his batteries. On November 5th he wrote to Alexander: 'It seems to me that in the present state of things — when the French army will be destroyed by hunger, climate, and daily engagements, and when it is probable that its chief will himself die of rage and remorse . . . that the measures that it is desired to take in Germany should be speeded up, and that operations can be undertaken in that country with forces inferior to those which would have been necessary if the French armies had remained in a fit state for service. It is to be hoped, further,

that the defeat of the French army will put new heart into Austria and even into Prussia, and facilitate the success of the attempts that might be made to bring them back to their true interest.'

This was only a brief preamble. The complete programme was not put forward till a fortnight later, when on November 5th-17th, he submitted a memoir that combines the persuasive reasoning of the statesman, the skilfully disguised flattery of the courtier and the irresistible eloquence of the tribune. He has no longer any doubt that 'the dissolution of the French army and the ignominious flight of Napoleon, with rage and remorse in his heart, ought to lead to *a change in the nature of the war*, its theatre, and all the foreign and federative relations of Russia'. He does not hesitate to declare in anticipation that the war will henceforth be offensive and 'its theatre will be transferred abroad'. He does not wish to conceal from his protector the difficulties of this new operation, to which the Russian nation would be entirely indifferent. Further 'we can no longer count on deserts, devastations, masses, and the force of things alone. Ground will have to be fought for, resources economically used, the inhabitants influenced. Intelligence, activity, humanity and liberal feelings will be needed in the generals, discipline in the soldiers'. But he begs Alexander not to be deterred by these obstacles. If he were to act otherwise and resign himself to a defensive war, the risks would only be increased thereby, and the enemy would be given leisure to set in motion all the resources of Western and Southern Europe, and an indefinite prolongation of the struggle between Russia and the rest of the continent would inevitably follow. 'Austria and Prussia will give heed to their true interests the moment the Russian army is on their frontiers to give them support and protection against the oppressor,' and the other German princes will perhaps join in later on, when they

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have overcome 'the fear that is so deeply rooted in their debased souls'. Lastly, England would be insistently asked to organize an army between the Elbe, the Yssel and the Rhine. 'Everything,' he continued, 'proves that the French army is no longer capable of standing up to an enemy, and that the sole feeling it inspires now is that of pity.' Nothing would stop the Russian army on its victorious career; reinforced by the Prussian and Austrian armies it could even in the course of this winter (!) make itself master of all Germany. With the prospect of so glorious a campaign 'the noble and generous Emperor will not hesitate. He will reject timid and erroneous ideas . . . he will wish to be the benefactor and pacificator of Europe as he has been the saviour of his own empire'.

Throughout this memoir there rings, as a dominant note, his certainty of success. One would say that he is hypnotizing the other, imposing his will, dictating to the powerful autocrat, with a guarantee of results, a complete programme of action, and even the choice of executants for it.

'The war being transferred to Germany, the inhabitants will be treated kindly, roused against the common enemy.' The King of Prussia will be pressed to put his military forces at the disposition of the cause and to 'constitute his ministry and his entourage of persons who have proved the purity of their principles'. Stein's old enemies are not forgotten; Frederick William is to be obliged to get rid of the 'cowardly and contemptible bog' that surrounds him at present. To the other princes the 'right of conquest' will be applied. Lastly, in due time, the lot of Germany will be decided upon in conformity with the true interests of the nations and of Europe.

At this decisive epoch, when the Russian Emperor is about 'to materialize his ten years of waiting, work and sacrifices', when, at the head of the Powers of Europe, he is called upon to play the august role of benefactor and

restorer, it is above all necessary to find the 'immediate instruments for the execution of this little design'. At this point he delivers an undisguised attack on the Chancellor Rumiantsov. Without expressly naming him, he urges the Tsar to dismiss from his councils 'that false and capricious man, with his characterless methods and his honeyed and insincere manner'. And then he becomes bolder still. On the entry of Russian troops into Germany — which he is now treating as a certainty — his application of the Tsar's generous principles 'cannot be entrusted to a general of the army, who will neither have the elementary knowledge and habit of political and administrative affairs, nor the time to acquire them. When the frontier is crossed, therefore, a Council should at once be formed for administrative and diplomatic business. 'Persons who have remained faithful to the Cause should be told off to accompany the Russian army from the moment of its entry into Germany, and recourse must be had to the collaboration of men known for their opinions and preceded by their reputations, inspiring great confidence in the allies and Europe.' Stein's own candidature for the post of Alexander's supreme representative in a liberated Germany could hardly be stated in plainer words.

The boldness that had so often injured Stein in his relations with the obstinate, petty-minded and narrow King of Prussia was exactly the appropriate tactic to use with the Tsar, weak but high-souled and generous. At this turning-point in the history of peoples and his own destiny, Stein scored a complete success.

'The Emperor,' he wrote later, 'spoke to me on the subject of this memoir. He asked me whom he should choose. I answered that he knew the men better than I, and that he need only follow the dictates of his own wisdom. He declared his decision to continue the war and set out for his armies in December, accompanied by Count Nesselrode.'

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These few laconic phrases summed up an entire reversal of Russian policy. Alexander's departure for army headquarters, from which he had kept away during almost the whole of the campaign in Russia, could only mean one thing, a fresh campaign. And the choice of Nesselrode, the son of a Rhenish lord, was an equally plain indication of the next field for Russian arms, and of the policy that the Tsar would dictate to Rumiantsov's successor.

Stein remained at St. Petersburg, for his hour was not yet come. He made the acquaintance of the Russian winter in very comfortable surroundings. 'We have much snow,' he tells his wife, '6 to 8 degrees of frost, but one is well protected here. Not only the rooms, but also the stairs and corridors are heated by large circulation stoves which distribute the heat and maintain it perfectly. One goes out only in wadded overcoat or mantle (a very good way is to use eiderdown) and in one's great fur or felt boots one looks like a Lapp.'

But his impatience increased daily. On December 18th, in anticipation of the triumphal entry of the Russian troops into Germany, he addressed to the Tsar a new note dealing with the *levée en masse* of the population of the territory to be occupied — conscription for regular troops (four men in every hundred) and formation of militia and second militia out of all men between 18 and 60. Three days later, unable to endure it any longer, he wrote a feverish letter to the Tsar.

'The necessary consequence of the proved and evident destruction of the French Army is the occupation of North Germany, and primarily of Prussia to the banks of the Elbe. The arrangement of this occupation, which will necessarily be provisional until a definite convention is made with the King, will require various measures *for which Your Imperial Majesty will think fit to summon me to your person*. In that case I venture to ask You graciously to define the spheres of

activity to which it may please Your Majesty to assign me, *to give me the full powers* necessary for its fulfilment and to accord me the confidence of allowing me to act alone, taking Your orders directly without the intervention of intermediaries and assistants.'

This letter, preserved in the State archives at Moscow, bears the Tsar's manuscript note, 'Write to him to come.'

On January 5th, 1813, Stein and Arndt, enveloped in furs, settled down in a large sleigh which was to bear them towards their own country. The day was declining, wrote Arndt, and the bells of St. Petersburg's innumerable churches were summoning the faithful to prayer. Two valets took up their posts on the steps behind, and a mounted Feldjäger led the way. It lay through Pskov towards Vilna and the Prussian frontier. The further they proceeded, the more tragic became the aspect of the countryside — war had left its imprint. They met crowds of prisoners moving to the interior under escort. 'These unhappy eaters of horses, their clothes in rags, blue with the cold, had lost all appearance of being human. They died before our eyes in the villages and at the post houses. We saw sledges full of sick men lying on straw and piled one on top of another. When one died he was simply thrown out on to the snow. Corpses lay all along the road; they and the carcasses of animals showed the way to Vilna so clearly that the most stupid could scarcely have missed it. Our horses neighed and danced with fear, not on account of the corpses but of the wolves, who several times approached in packs of ten or fifteen and hurled themselves on their prey.'¹

In the environs of Vilna the spectacle became horrible. 'One saw nothing but cartloads of corpses collected from the roads or the hospitals, and columns of prisoners in shreds, worn out by sufferings of all kinds, haggard-eyed

¹ Arndt, *Memoirs*.

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and livid, waiting for death in dull silence. These unhappy men brought epidemic disease with them wherever they went, and the villagers, not unnaturally, repulsed them, looking on them with horror as victims expiating, by a cruel death, the atrocious crime of having been the accomplices and instruments of Napoleon's plans of destruction.'

At Vilna itself they were met by a crop of sensational news and fantastic rumours. 'It is established by most reliable authorities,' wrote Stein to his wife, 'that the French soldiers reduced to the extremity of misery, fed on the bodies of their unhappy comrades, and that they have been found seated at the fire preparing their frightful meal. A column of 2000 men gave itself up to a Russian medical officer who was passing in his carriage. The population of Vilna, which is mostly Jewish, fell upon the rearguard of the Grand Army and made many prisoners of the Imperial Guard.' He was told of Murat's entering Vilna on foot with a stick in his hand and wrapped in a shawl, with a coachman's hat on his head, and of Napoleon's rapid passage 'hiding his shame and rage behind the closed windows of his berline'; the misery of his aides-de-camp 'meek, submissive, thankful to be offered a morsel of bread'. 'The booty taken by the light troops is immense,' he continues; 'one can estimate that every Cossack has got 300 ducats' worth. The Cossacks have presented 1600 pounds of silver to the Church of the Virgin of Kazan at St. Petersburg to be made into statues of the four Evangelists.' *Sancta simplicitas*.

Amongst all this collection of rearguard yarns, Stein omits to mention an amazing piece of news that must have reached him by that time.

On December 31st, 1812, some days before Stein left St. Petersburg, General Yorck had signed at the Mill of Poscherun, near Tauroggen, the famous Convention by which the remains of the Prussian contingent—18,000 excellent soldiers—fell out of the Grand Army, thus

consummating *de facto*, if not *de jure*, the rupture of the Franco-Prussian alliance. It is somewhat astonishing to find Stein silent on this event, which after all was the crown of all his work in Russia, the definitive triumph of the conspiracy that he had set on foot. But Stein could be certain that his wife would not be ignorant of news that had made all Germany quiver with joy. Perhaps also he hesitated to comment on a situation which had developed more or less outside his direct control, lest he should seem to claim the merit of another's success.

The history of the Convention of Tauroggen has been studied in all its aspects and need not be gone into in detail here. Yorck's defection had long been prepared, *pour-parlers* having been opened between the Prussian general and the Russian general Count Essen, Governor of Riga, as early as September 24th, and continued by the latter's successor Paulucci. The *débâcle* of Napoleon's main army had placed the Prussians in a very precarious situation. Yorck has asserted that it was impossible for him to continue his retreat without being attacked in flank and rear, and that he signed the Convention in order to save his troops, war material and supplies. But these arguments are unconvincing; with a little energy Yorck, who had only a weak curtain of Russian troops to deal with, could have extricated himself and joined the main body of Macdonald's French corps. And if this energy was wanting, it was because he saw in his defection the saving of the German fatherland. In other words, he had been won over to the views of which in Russia Stein was the protagonist.

Yorck was not one of Stein's friends. Tall, corpulent, egoistic, close, unforthcoming, brusque, he belonged to the aristocratic clique that had opposed a die-hard resistance to the Steinian reforms. 'At last,' he wrote on November 26th, 1808, two days after Stein's resignation, 'one of those madmen's heads has been crushed, and the rest of the viper

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brood will die of its own poison. . . . If anything is certain, it is that the right course in politics is to let things take their course. The German will never go in for a Sicilian Vespers or a Vendée: the Prussian peasant will do nothing unless he has the order of his King and sees the big battalions on his side.' True to his own formula, Yorck had patiently waited on political events. He had obediently followed the standard of the Conqueror into the Russian plains. And then — quite suddenly — he revolted. He committed an act of insubordination not merely towards his generalissimo Napoleon, but toward his own King, an unparalleled event in the annals of the Prussian army, where blind obedience, *perinde ac cadaver esset*, had been set up as an article of faith.¹

The determining factors in Yorck's action — apart from the purely military, which as we have remarked, are highly disputable — are unknown to us. 'The step I have taken,' he wrote to Frederick William, 'has been taken without Your Majesty's orders. Circumstances and most imperative necessity ought however to justify it, even if policy makes it necessary that I should be condemned. . . . I am ready to accept Your Majesty's judgment calmly, for I can face bullets on the place of execution as well as on the field of battle.' In a letter to Bülow dated January 13th he was more open. 'It is with a bleeding heart that I rend the ties of obedience. The King is not free, and the Army must give him back his liberty. I shall march with 50,000 men on Berlin and the Elbe, and on the Elbe I shall say to the King, "Here, Sire, is your army and my old head".'

The King is not free, he must be free — is not that precisely what Stein and all his entourage had been preaching from the very outset of the Russian campaign? And is it

¹ Consider that astonishing drama of Kleist, *The Prince of Homburg*. The hero who has won a brilliant victory, is condemned to death by the King because he has begun the battle without waiting for the orders of his Chief. He is saved by the intervention of his beloved. Such a 'tragic conflict' is incomprehensible to any but a Prussian reader.

straining facts to presume that it was the propaganda set going by Stein and the German Committee over which he presided that brought about Yorck's 'conversion'?

The general had certainly had in his hands the proclamation, signed by the Russian generalissimo Barclay de Tolly but drafted by Stein, at the beginning of the war. 'Germans, why do you make war on Russia?' was the question asked in this document, which was widely circulated in the Prussian ranks. 'Why do you treat as enemies the peoples who have had ties of friendship with you for generations, who have welcomed amongst them thousands of your compatriots and have honourably given them scope for their talents and industry? . . . You whom the Conqueror has dragged to the frontiers of Russia, leave at last the standard of slavery, and rejoin under the flag of country and national honour.' Nor could Yorck have been ignorant of Arndt's 'Catechism for German soldiers', written in a popular, vivid and emotional style, and asserting the primacy of duty to the nation over loyalty to the sovereign. 'The German soldier's honour requires him to break his sword before a prince who dares to order him to use it in defending the cause of the French and their despotic chief. . . . The princes, with their honours and their miseries, come and go, but the nation is eternal and immortal.'

What was the Convention of Tauroggen if it was not the materialization of these ideas? Stein and Yorck had for many years followed different roads, fought for diametrically opposed views. And now they arrived at the same end. The junction of these two destinies — the almost simultaneous arrival at Königsberg of the proscribed Minister and the rebel General — was to be the signal for the uprising of Prussia and, presently, of all Germany.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UPRISING OF GERMANY

WHEN Alexander I crossed the frontier of his empire at the head of a much-weakened army — scarcely more than 40,000 effectives — there was nothing to indicate with certainty how this Germany that he was coming to liberate would react to his troops. The patriotic exasperation of an enslaved people, of which Stein made so much, proved nothing as to the attitude of the German princes, and especially as to that of the King of Prussia.

Before leaving St. Petersburg Stein had written to Frederick William a letter of remarkable frankness, appealing to him to 'use the activity that God had given him to break his people's fetters'. 'Let not the Emperor Alexander's example be lost on you, Sire,' cried the banished statesman. 'You have great misfortunes to wipe out. The eyes of contemporaries and of posterity are fixed on your Majesty; it depends on you to wipe out, at this moment, the memory of Prussia's present servitude by a noble devotion worthy of the great men whom you count among your ancestors.' As excuse for this unusual language he recalls 'my old relations of service, my respectful devotion and my proved fidelity'. 'You will not be astonished, Sire, at my language; it is in conformity with the principles that I have always professed, and with my conduct as well known to your Majesty.' Alas! the King of Prussia was only too familiar with those principles and this conduct. They could only inspire him with fear and mistrust, and Stein's letter met with the same fate as that which he had presented on the eve of Jena. The King pretended that he had never received it.

As late as the beginning of January 1813, Frederick William was lavish in his expressions of fidelity to France 'dictated equally by loyalty and by interest'. He disassociated himself in the most categorical way from Yorck's act, and officially disavowed the Tauroggen Convention as an 'act of insubordination'. 'I am not,' he said to Narbonne, 'one of those muddled enthusiasts, those ridiculous shouters. No one is more convinced than I am of the immensity of your Emperor's [actual] resources and the resources that his genius can create.'

Frederick William was perhaps quite sincere in this last phrase, but in any case, it expressed an accurate appreciation of the situation. The great events of history do not fit themselves together so simply as they are made to do in the school text books. The abandonment of Napoleon's cause and the conclusion of an alliance with Russia involved terrible risks for the King. In spite of the Russian failure, Napoleon's prestige was still immense. He disposed of 140,000 men, a force infinitely superior to that of the Russians, and a new levy of recruits would be easy. He had no reason as yet to fear that the Austrian Emperor, his father-in-law, would fall away, and the princes of the Rhine Confederation showed not the smallest inclination to oppose him. The dangers of a struggle with Napoleon, then, were manifest. What would be its advantages? Might not a victorious Tsar want to extend Russia to the Vistula line, and reconstitute the Polish Kingdom under his own sceptre? If so, Frederick William might one day find himself rewarded for his adhesion to the Russian alliance by the loss of all the eastern provinces that had been acquired in the various Partitions of Poland.

In this situation, Stein's line of action was clear — to force events once more, and put the weak King in the presence of a *fait accompli*. At all costs, Russian-Polish collusion must be prevented, and at the same time the

population of Prussia must be roused without waiting for orders, so that the King's hand would be forced.

No sooner arrived at the Russian headquarters than he set to work. He declared, without beating about the bush, that a reconstitution of Poland under the aegis of the Tsar would be a monstrous thing. He sought to convince Alexander 'that a people composed of nobles, Jews and serfs, demoralized by centuries of anarchy, is incapable of making intelligent use of liberty'. (What a contrast with his attitude in 1807 and 1811 when he had ardently advocated the regeneration of a Poland incorporated in Prussia. But such an inconsistency was a small matter to the German patriot.) And while thus seeking to dissuade the Tsar by arguing that the true interests of Russia were against a union with Poland, 'since the Russians detest and despise the Poles', he did not hesitate to break faith with his benefactor, by attempting to bring about an intervention by England. He suggested to the British Cabinet, through Münster, that an energetic declaration might be timely, in order to moderate Alexander's appetite for conquests and prevent Russia expanding to the mouths of the Vistula and Oder.

These Machiavellian tactics might or might not have succeeded. But, in fact, Alexander himself had diplomatic subtlety enough to judge the situation sanely. Even without consulting his German adviser, he told the Poles that 'if I am with you, that will detach Prussia and Austria. With wisdom and prudence, these difficulties will be overcome', and he contented himself for the moment with obtaining a measure of discreet assistance from them, while sending them away empty-handed. On this side, then, the danger that Stein feared was avoided. He could act freely without risk of Prussia's being weakened for the sake of the Poles, and he betook himself instantly to East Prussia for the supreme task.

He took with him an extraordinary document signed by

the Tsar of Russia on January 18th, 1813. 'We, Alexander, by the grace of God Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, make known by these presents that East and West Prussia now in occupation of our Armies . . . and Our relations with His Majesty the King of Prussia being still undecided, we have thought it indispensable to take provisional measures of surveillance and direction, in order to guide the provincial authorities and to make the resources of the Country available for the good cause. We have therefore nominated. . . Baron Henri Charles de Stein, Knight of the Order of the Red Eagle, to repair to Königsberg and there to inform himself of the situation of the country in order to activate the military and pecuniary means for the support of Our operations against the French Armies. We charge him to see . . . that the property of the French and their allies is sequestrated, that the arming and organization of the militia and the population proceeds, in accordance with the plans formed and approved by H.M. the King of Prussia, as quickly as possible . . . to remove agents whom he may consider incapable or ill-intentioned, to watch and even to arrest suspected persons. The mission will be terminated the moment We have concluded a definite arrangement with the King of Prussia, whereupon the administration of his provinces will cease and Baron Stein will return to Us. And We promise on Our Imperial word that We will approve all that he shall decide and carry out in virtue of these full powers.'

And thus Stein re-enters as triumphant dictator the city where he had once been the servant of a jealous master — and after disgrace and proscription.

'The moment has come,' he writes to his old friend Schön, in charge now of the district of Gumbinnen, 'when Germany must rise to re-conquer her liberty and honour, and prove that it is not the people, but the princes, who have voluntarily bent their necks to the yoke.'

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The very evening of his arrival, January 22nd, 1813, Stein wrote to Auerswald, civil governor of the province, requiring him to convoke a general meeting of the Estates in order to decide on the creation of a Landwehr and Landsturm.

The hour of general insurrection was well chosen, for Yorck's capitulation, following on the defeat of the Grand Army, had revived hope in all Germans. 'There had been insults, provocations, threats,' wrote Marshal Macdonald almost as soon as he re-entered the province. 'I have seen for myself how excited both soldiers and inhabitants are against us.' The miserable aspect of the retreating French troops had constituted greatly to raise the people's temper. 'At Insterburg,' wrote Bülow, 'there passed, yesterday the 23rd, about 1500 men armed and fit for service, with 300 horses. All the rest went through the town like a herd in disorder. Only one man in two hundred had a musket.' At Königsberg the agitation was at its height, and patriotic meetings were called by an enthusiastic noble, Von der Gröben, 'to express the spirit of the community and propitiate the *manes* of our Great Frederick'.

The powder, then, was all ready, but it was the arrival of Stein that fired the train. The outlaw's numerous admirers gave him an enthusiastic reception, and it was with difficulty that he got away from all the dinners and banquets organized by the faithful. He had other things to do; without even waiting for the meeting of the provincial Estates he took, alone and on his own responsibility, a whole series of emergency measures. He raised the Continental Blockade, seized the public monies, borrowed in the name of the provinces, made Russian paper money legal and inconvertible, and sequestered the property of the Duke of Anhalt as a Member of the Confederation of the Rhine. Auerswald countersigned the papers for all this, but eventually, seized with scruples — for their illegality was flagrant —

he refused to go on doing so, and took to his bed on the pretext of sickness.

Here, for the first time, Stein was made to realize, as he was so often to feel in the future, the ambiguity of his position. He regarded himself as the liberator of Germany, but from the administrative point of view was he not simply the plenipotentiary of a foreign power? On January 21st, Alexander wrote to inform Frederick William: 'I have invested with my full powers a Russian dignitary, but one who is one of Your Majesty's most faithful subjects, Baron von Stein. I hope that, in doing so, I have proved to your Majesty that the preservation of his States for their legitimate sovereign is a matter very near to my heart.'

It was probably with a bitter smile that the King read this missive — 'One of your Majesty's most faithful subjects'. What irony! But . . . 'A Russian dignitary' — well, he should henceforth be treated as such.

Instinctively, and without even having obtained the King's instructions, the officials of Prussia took up the same attitude, opposing and obstructing the 'Tsar's delegate'. The convocation of the Estates gave rise to a fantastic amount of intrigue and disputation. First of all, it was pronounced illegal, the King alone having the right to summon them; later, a formula was accepted which gave to the assembly a semi-official character only. At the last moment, a terrific quarrel arose between Stein and Yorck, the latter accusing the Baron of having 'thrown affairs into confusion with his Russian full powers and his insatiable demands'. In this mood of despair, the general even made preparations to abandon his doomed country and sail for England. But somehow everything was smoothed out. Stein abstained from participating in the meeting over which he was to have presided, contented himself with sending it a message, and even decided to leave Königsberg in order to allay the passions that had been aroused.



Meeting of the Emperor of Russia, King of Prussia and Bernadotte, Crown Prince of Sweden, in the Great Square at Leipzig after the battle of the 18th of October, 1813

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'Never,' exclaims Schön, 'has he seemed to me greater than in this moment of abnegation.'

But this hurried ending to his Königsberg visit in no way diminishes its historical importance. Even before he started on the return journey he was able (February 7th) to inform Alexander that his enterprise had been completely successful. 'The assembly of the Estates, or of the nobility and towns (*sic*) was held to-day. It consists of those groups which are most prominent in point of property and most respected in point of character. All were animated by perfect public spirit. General Yorck proposed to the Assembly the formation of a reserve of 13,000 men to keep his corps up to establishment, a militia of 20,000 and an armed population [to serve] whenever the enemy should cross the Vistula, and lastly a corps of 700 volunteers equipped at their own expense to act as a nursery for officers. These proposals were unanimously accepted, a committee was set up to deal with organization and detail, and all promises the happiest results, of which the principal will be that the example set by these provinces will powerfully influence all the rest of Germany.'

The dryness of official style prevents Stein from attempting to describe the atmosphere of boundless enthusiasm in which the Assembly did its work. The deputies unanimously approved the Landwehr and Landsturm Order, which called under arms all men between 18 and 60, just as Stein had always recommended. They frantically acclaimed Yorck, who cried, 'It is on the field of battle that I want applause'. Without waiting for the King's orders, the deputies proclaimed insurrection against the enemy.

'The measures taken by the Assembly,' wrote Schön, 'are more important than the burning of Moscow or the 28 degrees of frost. . . . The march of the Russians would have been a simple Cossack raid had not the people spoken as it did at the Diet.' Stein had effectively communicated his

own fever to the whole country. 'In a fortnight,' says Sorel, 'he did more for the regeneration of Prussia than in a year of his Ministry.' The first step, the decisive step, was taken. The next thing was to legalize all these revolutionary doings by obtaining the King's approval.

During these decisive weeks of January and February 1813, while the Russian forces were pursuing their march towards the Vistula, Frederick William was beginning to detach himself from Napoleon. In order to be freed from the surveillance of the French garrison of Berlin, he moved the seat of government to Silesia, which was neutralized territory, and from Breslau he took the first mobilization measures — the formation of a corps of volunteer Jägers and the calling to the colours of young men between 20 and 34, ostensibly to prepare an auxiliary corps for Napoleon's service. At the same time he opened secret *pourparlers* with Russia. Colonel Knesebeck was sent to Alexander's headquarters to negotiate a treaty of alliance.

When Stein rejoined these headquarters he found the Prussian emissary already there. But a brief talk convinced him that, Germans though they were, they did not speak the same language. Conformably to the royal instructions and to his own narrow outlook, Knesebeck complained of Stein's revolutionary activities in Prussia. He expressed his indignation at their daring to release the population from their obedience to their legitimate sovereign. Knesebeck sought to obtain from the Tsar, as the price of alliance, the restitution to Prussia of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and all the lost provinces. Stein, on the other hand, as Knesebeck himself says, had only one object in view, the effective participation of Germany in the war. 'The reconstitution of Prussia in its old limits does not interest him in the least,' and moreover, he knew perfectly well that Alexander would never agree to sacrifice his Polish friends to Prussian covetousness, even if his dream of a regenerated

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Poland was not to be realized. In these conditions, the negotiation dragged on with no hope of a result.

One more, Stein's intervention brought about the decision. On February 10th he wrote to the Tsar: 'The essential thing is to make an end of the fluctuations of Prussia. . . . To terminate these uncertainties, I venture to propose to your Imperial Majesty that I should be sent to Breslau to conclude a definitive arrangement with the King,' and Alexander, who was perturbed by the dangerous position of his armies, immediately approved the suggestion of his faithful German adviser. After having made a short incognito visit to Silesia to see how the land lay, Stein set out officially for Breslau accompanied by the diplomat Anstett, and under the stout escort of fifty Cossacks. He carried a draft treaty of alliance and an autograph letter from the Tsar to the King. 'Baron von Stein seizes this opportunity to lay himself at your Majesty's feet. It is certain that you possess no more faithful subject than he is. In the time — nearly a year — that he has been with me, I have learned every day to know him better and appreciate him more. He is acquainted with all my plans and all my views on Germany, and he can give you an accurate account of them.'

On February 26th M. de Saint-Marsan, the French Minister, who had believed to the last in the friendly intentions of the Prussians, and had written as late as January 5th that the conduct of the King and of his minister Hardenberg seemed to be 'above all suspicion', had to announce to his master the event that was to mark the collapse of his whole policy. 'I feel that I cannot omit to inform your Majesty that two Russian Commissioners arrived here yesterday evening. No secret is made about one of them — State Councillor Anstett, who, it is said, has come to make arrangements for neutrality (!) . . . The other is the celebrated M. de Stein; he has not left his inn, where he is ill.

It is sought to keep his arrival secret, but I think I can be sure of it. I have let the day pass to see if M. de Hardenberg would tell me anything, but he has not done so. I am asking him for an interview in order to demand an explanation of this extraordinary conduct.¹

Though Saint-Marsan did not know it, the King had already given his approval to the draft offensive and defensive alliance which stipulated for Prussia's immediate entry into the war against France with at least 80,000 men. Stein had been right. Knesebeck had either gone beyond his instructions, or else had been left behind by events, for as a matter of fact, while he was vainly trying to wring impossible concessions from the Tsar at the Russian headquarters, the wind had changed at Breslau. There, the King and his advisers were wondering in extreme anxiety why the negotiations were hanging fire, and day by day expecting the glad news that Knesebeck was unable to send them. Alexander's letter, therefore, arrived at the right moment. This time there were no more tergiversations. The force of events triumphed over the king's fears, limitations and weakness. With the royal approval and Hardenberg's seal, it was sent straight back for Kutuzov's signature. The die was cast.

By a strange irony of Fate, this historic decision, which was the fulfilment of all Stein's aspirations, happened without him. On one point Saint-Marsan's information was accurate — Stein was really ill.' In this chance capital, over-crowded with its momentary guests, he could not find a lodging. Disconcerted by the coldness of Hardenberg's reception, impatient and feverish, he stopped in the market place. There, quite by chance, he met Baron von Lützow, who offered him a modest room at the Golden Sceptre Inn. And there he took to his bed, stricken down by illness. Thus while Anstett was presenting the treaty for the King's

¹ Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prussia 252, No. 371.

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approbation, its author and inspiring genius lay delirious in an attic, at death's door, forgotten, isolated, abandoned by all. 'M. de Stein is very ill,' wrote Saint-Marsan, adding in his own hand (March 2nd) 'his life is almost despaired of; his illness has turned into a nervous fever, malignant urticaria.'¹

It was a supreme example of the ingratitude of kings — Frederick William manifested complete indifference toward the man to whom he owed everything. He abstained even from inquiring about the invalid, and the servile courtiers followed his example. Afterwards they sought to justify themselves by political considerations, i.e. the necessity of lulling French suspicions till the declaration of war. But Stein was not deceived, and he never forgot those weeks in which he had measured the full extent of human baseness.

His robust constitution saved him. Little by little, devoted friends reappeared, amongst others Prince William, the former negotiator in Paris. Stein's wife and children, duly sent for, hastened from Prague to the sick-bed, and at last the day of revenge came. On March 15th the Emperor Alexander entered Breslau amidst the acclamations of the crowd, and immediately repaired to the dwelling of his suffering friend. And henceforth the passages of the Golden Sceptre were never empty of courtiers eager to pay their respects to this Baron von Stein whom yesterday they had professed not to know.

Once recovered, he found a vast field of activity before him. Especially, he was called upon to formulate a policy for the allied armies to follow in advancing across Germany through territories hitherto subject to Napoleon's authority. On March 16th he presented a detailed report on the subject to Alexander, and three days later a Convention was signed by Stein and Nesselrode for the Tsar and by Scharnhorst and Hardenberg for the King.

¹ Archives of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Prussia 252.

Adopting our statesman's proposal, the Allied Powers decided to publish a proclamation announcing that their one object was to release Germany from the influence and domination of France. The princes and peoples were invited to co-operate in the liberation of their country, and any German prince who should fail to respond to the appeal was threatened with the loss of his states. An Administrative Council, with unlimited powers, was set up for the government of the countries occupied, and its terms of reference covered the levying of recruits, police, finance, armament, requisitions, and all dealings with the princes concerning their contributions of men, supplies and money for the re-establishment of their country's independence. The members of this Council were nominated on the spot, Schön and Rehding for the Prussian Government, Stein with Kuchubei (who was still absent in Russia) for that of Alexander. From the first, what with the authority behind him and the weight of his own personality, Stein became the unquestioned chief of this organization, and thus the effective ruler of vast territories that the allied advance gradually brought under him.

But higher than the satisfaction of personal ambitions thus crowned was the patriot's joy of seeing all Prussia rise to the appeal of her King and take up arms against France.

On March 17th, the King had launched the famous proclamation 'To My People' announcing the rupture with Napoleon. 'Inhabitants of Prussia, Brandenburg, Silesia, Pomerania, you know well how you have had to suffer in these seven years. You know the grim fate that awaits you if this war ends otherwise than in honour and glory. Think of your ancestors, of the Great Elector, of the Great Frederick. . . . If we would not cease to be Prussians and Germans, we must fight the last decisive battle for our existence.'

To the mobilized army he had proclaimed a Holy

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War. 'He who can die for the salvation of his country does not think about his own existence. May scorn fall upon the selfish man who cannot sacrifice all to the common good! Victory is God's gift.' To reward the deeds of valour to come, he had instituted the Iron Cross. Conformably to the ideas of Stein and Scharnhorst, he had called out the Landwehr and Landsturm. The role of the latter was defined, by the King's order, with unequivocal clarity—to keep the enemy continually on the alert, to destroy him, isolated or in bodies. The men of the Landsturm were to wear no uniform, 'as uniform would cause them to be recognized'. At the enemy's approach, the inhabitants were to evacuate their villages, take refuge in the woods, carry off the corn, smash the casks, burn the mills and boats, fill up the wells, cut the bridges — 'for it costs less to rebuild a village than to feed the enemy'.

And now the people's answer came with a spontaneous *élan* that fulfilled all the expectations of Stein and his friends. It was nothing less than an explosion of passionate patriotism. The pastors in their pulpits called to arms. At Berlin University, Professor Stephens announced in his lecture room that he was going to join up, and his example carried all his young hearers with him. Like scenes occurred in the University of Halle.¹ In the schools, the older classes enrolled, headed by the teachers — Berlin alone produced 370 schoolboy volunteers. Young men came in from the far Kingdom of Westphalia to fight under their old flag. Even before joining the army, the peasants drilled in barns at night and offered the government cloth, linen and money. The nobles furnished saddled horses and forage, the girls of the poorer classes gave their hair. The married women gave up their gold rings and took iron ones inscribed 'I give gold for iron.' Wealthy families sold their plate, and for long afterwards it was considered disgraceful in the

¹ Halle was outside the reduced Prussia of 1807-13. — TRANSLATOR.

Prussian nobility and bourgeoisie to be possessed of handsome silver.¹

The results of all this private initiative were astonishing. Berlin alone furnished 9,000 volunteers in three days, and the provinces of Prussia, with a population of 222,000 souls, armed 43,000. Since 1808, as we have seen, Prussia had only the right to an army of 42,000, but in a few weeks there were raised 95,000 recruits, 10,000 Volunteer Jägers and 120,000 Landwehr men. The total of 271,000 represented one man in every seventeen inhabitants, an effort considerably surpassing that of France at the time of the Convention, gigantic as that had been. And the framework of the new army was ready in the 30,000 Krümper (men dismissed to the reserve after brief training) produced by the ingenious scheme that Scharnhorst had worked out during Stein's ministry. It was Prussia itself that was joining the fray.

Madame de Staël remarks, in the last chapter of her famous *De l'Allemagne*, which had so impressed Stein in Russia, that 'enthusiasm is the truly distinctive quality of the German nation'. 'War, even if undertaken with personal ends, always gives some of the joys of enthusiasm. The intoxication of a day of battle, the pleasure of exposing one's self to death when all our nature tells us to love life — all this is to be attributed to enthusiasm. The martial music, the neighing of horses, the explosion of the powder, the mass of soldiers dressed in the same colours, moved by the same desire, ranged round the same banners, evoke an emotion that triumphs over the instinct of self-preservation; and this joy is so strong that neither fatigues, nor sufferings, nor perils, can disengage our souls from it.'

Other nations have experienced the same moments of *élan*, but Madame de Staël is not perhaps wrong in saying that the tendency is quite specially strong in the Germans. A

¹ During the war of 1914, efforts were made to revive this fashion in Germany—unnecessarily, as a matter of fact. To-day we observe its reappearance in Italy.

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people that is refractory to form and hostile to rationalism is certainly more susceptible to waves of brusque, diffuse, passionate and vague sentiment than a race that is sceptical and railing, clear and logical.

But up to the beginning of the nineteenth century the enthusiasms of the German people had manifested themselves only in the domains of religion, philosophy and poetry. As we have seen, national feeling in the German had lain at the sub-conscious level, and the notion of the State had never been able to take definitive shape. How, then, did it come about that in 1813 — for the first time for many centuries — that German frenzy, the *furor teutonicus*, shifted to the political and national field?

Stein's arrival at Königsberg, Yorck's defection, the alliance with victorious Russia were sparks that started a bonfire that was all 'ready to be kindled' as Prince Hatzfeldt said to Napoleon on January 29th. But how had the fuel been accumulated?

'The peoples of this nation are wretched,' wrote Marshal Augereau, commanding the French Army of Occupation, in December 1812. 'The sacrifices that war has imposed on them, the stoppage of all commerce, the billeting and feeding of troops, the provision of transport, all these things have made them hate the French.' The humblest peasant in Pomerania or Silesia had for a number of years been made to feel how closely major events were affecting his personal interests. But distress can be endured passively. It needed something more to arouse these peasants who had been serfs yesterday, to imbue them with the community spirit and the will to struggle and sacrifice.

X The uprising of 1813 can only be understood by regarding it as the result of a vast movement of ideas — philosophical, social, literary — of which the importance cannot be over-estimated, for its repercussions were still felt in 1870, 1914 and even in 1933. X

The bases of this philosophy are established by Fichte in his famous *Addresses to the German Nation*, pronounced in 1808 — at the height of the French occupation — to the students of the Berlin Academy.

Contemporaries were struck by the outward resemblance between Stein and Fichte, 'the same stockish body, the same broad and high forehead, the same serious, profound, and at moments terrible look', says Arndt. But still greater than the physical and fortuitous resemblance between the philosopher and the statesman was that between certain traits and tendencies of their ideologies. Both alike symbolized the eternal aspirations of the German mind, with its dynamism, its apotheosizing of the irrational, and its unrestrained cult of the individual and of national individuality.

Fichte boldly threw down the barriers which Kant had set up between the individual and the Cosmos. 'My system is, from one end to the other, an analysis of the concept of liberty,' he declared. 'One's conception of the world is a free creation of one's free ego.' This is idealism in its purest, most explosive and most dangerous state, a system that begins by divinizing man and leads up, through a maze of metaphysical and sociological considerations, to the divinization of the nation.

For Fichte, it is not thought (as the Cartesians had held), but will, that lies at the base of the spiritual world. This will is all-powerful. 'My will alone will float over the débris of the universe,' he proclaimed in his *Vocation of the Scholar*. To this metaphysical will he assigns in these *Addresses* a practical and immediate object. Even at a century's distance, the pamphlet presents an extraordinary interest. The style is turgid, heavy, old-fashioned and at times pedantic, but a sombre and violent passion emanates still from the dusty pages — a force of eloquence worthy of Cicero and Bossuet, and a unique thrill of patriotism that

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causes us sometimes to forget the logical weaknesses of the system and the humble subordination of philosophy to the political interests of the day.

The spirit of the preacher is haunted at certain moments by grandiose Biblical visions. He conjures up the figure of the prophet who is led by the Lord into a huge field of bones. The prophet speaks to them, breathes the divine spirit into them, and the bones take on flesh, become alive and transform themselves into a mighty army.¹ 'Be our spiritual life as dried up, be the bonds of our national unity as torn and scattered, as these bones of the prophet's, the vivifying breath of the Spirit has lost nothing of its power. It will seize upon the dead bones of our nation's body, it will put them together again and will call them to a new and glorious life.'

The avowed object of Fichte's lectures was to restore courage and hope to the vanquished, to proclaim joy to the afflicted and to help them to endure the great hour of trial. 'I see the first dawn of a new world. It throws its golden reflections on the summits of the mountains and announces the coming of day. Would I could capture the rays of this aurora wherein these sorrowful times should find the reflection of its true essence and the projection of its future evolution.' 'No man, no God, no providential event can help us — but only ourselves.'

Ordinary means, according to Fichte, are inadequate for bringing about a great national restoration. Fear, love of order, personal interest incite the pusillanimous to wish for a continuance of the existing state of things. There is only one way to arrive at the result, and that is to imbue the German youth (the hope of the Fatherland) with notions

¹ Ezekiel, xxxvii. 1-10. — TRANSLATOR.

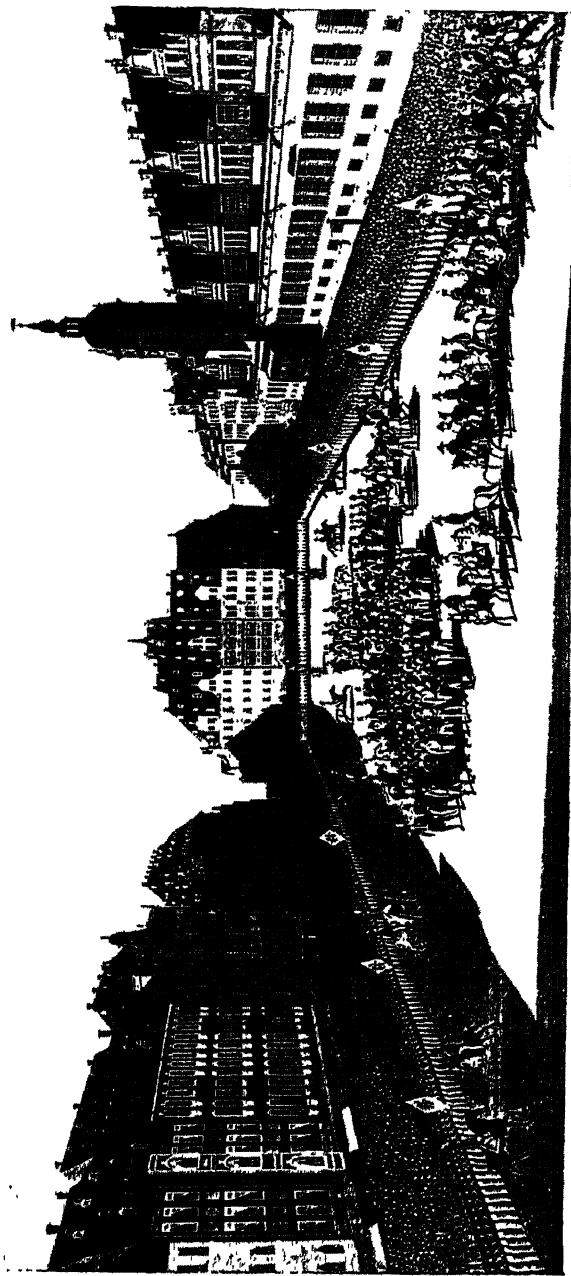
² It is impossible not to be struck by the resemblances between Fichte's phraseology and that of the National Socialists of present-day Germany. The latter, in fact, themselves point to the blood-bond that unites their theories with those of the philosopher. See especially the pamphlet of Ernst Bergmann, professor at Leipzig University, *Fichte und Nationalsozialismus* (Breslau, 1933).

of an ideal so high and so potent that this youth will willingly sacrifice its forces and, if need be, its life thereto. 'The pupil must be shown the picture of a social order that is essentially in conformity with the laws of reason. . . . The pupil must be so fired with the love of this order of things that it is absolutely impossible for him not to long for it and devote his every effort to its realization.' And how could youth fail to be roused to enthusiasm when it was called upon 'to transform the human race, with its earthly and sensual taints into beings noble and pure'?

Having reached this point in his argument, Fichte does not go on, as a French writer would have gone on, to trace the outlines of this dreamed-of social order. The new order, to which the youth of the country is called upon to sacrifice itself, is simply 'an eternal becoming', a permanent evolution of the immortal aspirations of the human soul. And so, in the twinkling of an eye, philosophical idealism has turned into militant Germanic patriotism.

But why 'Germanic'? Why should it be the German nation in particular, a nation humiliated and conquered, that is called upon to regenerate humanity? Would not the same reasoning apply to any other people whatever? The rest of the *Addresses* is simply a detailed answer to this fundamental question.

Fichte's political universe is a limited one. He only sees Western Europe and, in that Europe, only two sorts of people, both of German stock. One has preserved its primitive tongue, the symbol of the national soul, all through the centuries. The other, under the influence of migrations and perturbations, has adopted a foreign tongue and, therefore, a foreign civilization. The Germans obviously constitute the first category. Fichte nowhere explicitly says who are to be taken as belonging to the second, but it is not difficult to identify these representatives of a dead,



Formal entry of the Allied Sovereigns into Leipzig, 19th October, 1813

(From a drawing made on the spot)

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rigid, formalized civilization—the ‘Welschen’, the ‘Franks’, the detested French.

According to Fichte, the fact of possessing a ‘living’ language confers a special patent of nobility on a people. ‘It is not the man who speaks, but nature speaking in him.’ It is quite otherwise with a people that is unhappy enough to have adopted a foreign language, and accepted with it the heavy heritage of a past that is not its own. In them, life is only superficial, its roots are dead. Hence the German spirit will always keep its spontaneous naturalness, while the ‘spirit’ of ‘foreign’ peoples will be stamped with artificiality. The ‘foreign’ genius will sow its flowers on the beaten tracks of Classical wisdom, but the German spirit will dig into the soil to bring light into dark places, and lift the rocks that are to build the future house of mankind. The foreign genius is the charming sylph, the industrious bee, while the German spirit will be the eagle, with strong wings spread toward the sun.

In the famous Eighth Address, the climax of the series, Fichte proclaims categorically that ‘only the German, the primary-spontaneous (*ursprünglich*) man truly possesses a nationality’. This living nation, the unbroken ensemble of a chain of human generations that are subject to the same spiritual laws, is the outward and visible evidence of a law of Divine Evolution (*Entwicklung des Göttlichen*). Seen from this point of view, ‘people’ and ‘country’, as vessels and pledges of eternity, are ideas far transcending the notion of the State in the ordinary acceptation. Patriotism becomes a manifestation of the Eternal and the Divine in the world. ‘It is not the calm and bourgeois spirit of attachment to the constitution and the laws, but the devouring flame of the higher patriotism which will incite the whole-hearted man to sacrifice joyfully. As for the vulgar man, the mere instrument, he will be compelled to do so!’

This supreme joy of sacrifice, was it not felt by these

distant ancestors of the modern Germans, Arminius and his Teutons, who preferred death to the blessings of Roman civilization? and if to-day, exclaims Fichte, a new conqueror, be he as beneficent as a god, should offer the Germanic peoples all the happiness and prosperity imaginable, should they accept it? Should they not rather ask them if it is a 'German happiness' that he brings?

As we have seen, Stein's opposition to Napoleon's humanitarian dreams and schemes for universal monarchy and unified Europe rested on much the same arguments.¹ Fichte was equally clear. 'A universal monarchy is a detestable idea, contrary to reason.' 'The Divine nature expresses itself in the specific aptitudes of each people — steps of the great ladder of humanity. In preserving its invisible essence, a nation preserves the source of its life, the guarantee of its virtue and dignity.'

The conclusion of the *Addresses* is a scarcely disguised call to insurrection. 'We are conquered, but it depends on us, on our own will, whether or not we are despised, whether to all our other losses we add that of honour too.' 'It is not the strength of our arm, not the quality of our weapons, but our spiritual force that will help us to attain the victory.'

Fichte is convinced, even, that a state which introduced a system of national education, of the kind that he advocated, would not need a powerful army. For in its youth it would possess an army such as the world had never seen. Trained to physical exercises, compelled to undergo a craft apprenticeship (from which even the intellectuals would not be exempted), habituated to put aside all self-regarding impulses for the well-being of the community, this youth would be ready at the moment of danger to take up its arms. And this youth would be unconquerable.† 'It

¹ In our own day F. Sieburg takes up the same motif. 'The moral law that should rule in the new nation is not now limited to the notions of good and ill, it opposes that which is German to that which is not.'

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depends on you,' Fichte exclaimed to his young hearers, while the drums of a French regiment beat in the street below. 'Make your choice. Would you be the last of a despised race? Would you not rather be the initiators of a new era, the glory of which will surpass anything your imagination can conceive of?'

But philosophy was not alone in making itself the handmaid of politics in this Germany of the Napoleonic period — theology, too, did so. Throughout the French occupation the great preacher Schleiermacher — he also a friend and confidant of Stein — drew crowds every Sunday to his little modest Trinity Church in Berlin. He set himself to inculcate, under the Divine auspices, 'the fundamental principle of the epoch' — the willing sacrifice of the individual for the community. His mingled stream of Christian morality and nationalist fervour profoundly impressed the simple and pious souls of his auditors. Patriots and pamphleteers did their part in keeping up the same state of mind. Adam Müller, in his 'Elements of Political Art' (lectures delivered at Dresden in 1808-9), thought that the State was not to be compared with an industrial concern or a benefit society. The State has to satisfy all the needs, physical and spiritual, of a nation (the Totalitarian State, as we call it to-day). War, he declared, is part of the very essence of the State; it is the great school of character, it is what gives the State its outlines, its individuality, its personality. The great European confederation of the future, he says, will fly the German colours, for 'all that is grand, deep, and everlasting in all European institutions is German'.

Wilhelm von Humboldt, the creator of Berlin University and the reformer of Classical teaching in Prussia, likewise proclaims the necessity of making a free and strong Germany. 'Only a powerful nation can give free play to its spiritual forces.' Ernst Moritz Arndt insists, in his pamphlet *Germany and Europe*, on 'the necessity of a union of the People

and the State', and, in the *Soldiers' Catechism* mentioned above, on the primacy of the patriotic sentiment. Another pamphlet published during 1813 bears the suggestive title of *The Rhine, German river and not German frontier*. And lastly, Jahn (who was to collaborate with Stein in the second half of 1813), a coarse, vain, caricature-figure, a rabid barbarian as Treitschke calls him, set up as the fanatical prophet of *Deutschtum* and *Volkstum*, as panegyrist of the German race, and by a whole series of fiery — nay, incendiary — publications acquired an unparalleled influence over the minds of the youth.

The most characteristic feature of this whole movement of ideas was the participation in it of the poets. Goethe alone held aloof from the mêlée — 'Napoleon is too great for you,' he told his compatriots. And yet *Faust*, the master work of German literature, contributed powerfully to the awakening of national pride. 'A people that is capable of creating such a work must be meant for high destinies,' it was said, and not without reason. Schiller had died by the time the national awakening dawned, but nevertheless *Wilhelm Tell* was interpreted as a call to insurrection.

But, side by side with the old Weimar Classicism, a new literary school, the Romantic, was forming in the first years of the century, instinct with veneration of the past and love of the glorious traditions of Germanism. It is curious to see these high-flown dreamers constituting themselves the champions of an exasperated political nationalism. Novalis, he who first sang of the 'little blue flower', called for 'preachers of patriotism'; the whole world, he said, consists of an infinite number of individuals and the nations, too, are individualities. 'States will remain different, so long as men remain different,' and our duty is to cultivate these differences. A. W. Schlegel, another of the pillars of Romanticism, friend of Madame de Staël, exalted the national feeling with his Fichtean emphasis on

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the spontaneity of the German genius. According to Schlegel, 'individual particularities only develop freely among Germans; in France, Nature has produced 30,000,000 copies of the same work. The source of truth lies in German soil; among the Welschen it is the spirit of lies that rules.' And his brother Friedrich Schlegel spoke out with conviction for the ancient corporative forms and the hierarchic empire as against the Napoleonic system, which subjected the whole universe to a selfish domination and a mechanical organization. His philosophical and historical lectures from 1804-1806 might be summarily described as a call to defend national liberties against the French domination.

Such, in broad outline, was the current of ideas that was influencing the youth of Germany throughout the years preceding 1813. It was told that the old German Empire was dead, but that it was possible, imperative indeed, to rebuild it in a new form. The Imperial idea, once laughed at, was restored to honour. The miseries that the German nation was suffering under the yoke of the oppressor were explained as a trial that was to purify its soul and prepare it for sublime sacrifices at the altar of the fatherland. And it was in this wise, in a milieu of thinkers and poets — all belonging more or less to Stein's immediate entourage — that the modern idea of German unity came to birth. The offspring of grief, historical memories and a leap of romance and rebelliousness (Treitschke's phrase), it bears the permanent imprint of these origins in dreams and tears. Not refined slowly and methodically as in France, but put suddenly into the minds of an ardent youth by skilful propagandists, it was to remain spontaneous and unreflecting. Not having been refined by centuries of royalty and jurisprudence, it was destitute of clarity and precision. For a century yet means had to be found to reconcile the idea of this 'fatherland in the clouds' with the aims of narrow particularisms and an

almost complete lack of political liberties. There was nothing truly constructive, then, in this national movement, nothing even remotely resembling a political programme that was capable of immediate application. One trait, and only one, stands out with entire distinctness, and that was hatred of the foreigner — of the Jews sometimes, but of the French chiefly and always.

One would look in vain in the histories of other peoples for anything resembling the literary work of German poets during the campaign of 1813. Its foundations lay in the deep feeling of the masses themselves, which found expression also in the innumerable popular songs of the time. The poetic value of these nameless products is, generally speaking, *nil* — doggerel rhyming with the detested name of the tyrant. Nevertheless the names of three true artists emerge from the ruck of the Patriotic School — Schenken-dorf, Körner, and Arndt. The *Lieder* of the first-named glorify not so much the joys of battle and victory as the mystic love of native land. Playing upon the double meaning of the word Landsturm ('citizens in arms' and 'storm over the land') the poet sings in exaltation of the uprising of Germany. 'The fires are alight on the near and distant hills. Hail, O tempest! Hail, storm of the Lord! Breathe on our fields and on our fir-woods and purify the soul of our Country!' Profound religious feeling inspires the whole work — the struggle of the spirit is far more to him than the jingling of weapons. Victory over the enemy is but a means of reaching spiritual unity in the nation. The poet makes himself the herald of a new Germanic Empire. 'A day will come when we shall have to engage in the austere battle of the spirit, and to conquer the last enemies — hate, suspicion, greed, envy. And it is only then, only after fighting long and hard, that our German breasts may breathe the sigh of relief.'

Körner, too, who died a hero's death on the battlefield

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of Gadebusch at the age of twenty-two, saw in the struggle against Napoleon something infinitely more precious than a military operation. 'With pious courage, we enter the divine sanctuary,' he exclaimed at the blessing of the arms of his regiment, the famous Lützow Free Corps. 'God himself has lighted the fire that shows us the way to battle and victory. Let us give thanks to the Lord.' 'This is not a war of the kind that occupies crowned heads, it is a crusade, a holy war.' 'Ride, my people, the beacons are aflame, the light of Liberty appears to us in the North in all its splendour.' The famous Song of the Sword, the *Schwertlied* that every German child knows by heart, hymns the mystic marriage of the soldier with his sword that the Divine has blessed. 'The sword gleamed discreetly at my left side, and to my right hand God has married it as a bride.'

Sharper still is the note in Arndt, the third of the trio. His is the popular song, 'The trumpets are sounding, hussars to the front!' and the stanzas that millions of Germans recite to this day, 'God, who created iron, willed not a nation of slaves'. In him the mystic exaltation of the times rose to the highest levels. 'Forward, German peoples, forward to the Holy War! . . . God will show us Himself in death and in victory!'

But all this warlike poetry reached its supreme paroxysm at the crisis of Leipzig, the *Völkerschlacht*, the Battle of the Nations. Rückert, ponderously witty, said that 'Leipzig Fair lasted three days and three nights, and it was with a yardstick of iron that we settled the account'. But Arndt flung out a cry of triumph, 'God has scattered the Welschen like the sand'. And an anonymous writer gives humble thanks to the old German God, 'The mighty army of the French wanders in forest and snow, the Emperor a fugitive, the troops disbanded, men, horses and baggage. Such is the defeat that God has inflicted upon them.'

Powerful as was the current of ideas that we have here

attempted to describe in essentials, it did not at once permeate the German nation from end to end. It was only gradually, and under the influence of the Allies' successes and Napoleon's errors, that the whole of Germany passed from militant theory to the actual handling of arms. The rich and extensive region of the Rhine had been receiving the impress of the alien civilization for twenty years. There (as Professor Sagnac justly observes) France had achieved something very great indeed, something of which the Germans themselves would never have dared to dream. 'Having made war in order to liberate and not to enslave, she brought them all the free institutions that it had cost her ten years to win.' She had given them security and prosperity, had enriched the manufacturers, merchants and peasants alike. It was not surprising, therefore, that the Rhenish population at first showed itself refractory to the movement which had just begun on the distant Russian border. But the inhabitants of Central and Southern Germany, too, were slow to take it up—docility towards the princes proving stronger than national sentiment. Prussia had at first to lead the dance alone. It was on her territory that patriots from the four corners of Germany gathered to enlist in the Liberation movement—a fact eloquent of the comprehensiveness of Stein's historic achievement. The Rhenish lord, the baron of the old empire, had judged the future aright. The heritage of Frederick the Great, as buttressed by the Steinian reforms, acquired an immense and unexpected significance. The Prussian serf, transformed now into a citizen, conscious of his new worth, and following the lead of high-souled youth, became not only the instrument of national Liberation but the builder of Germany's future greatness.

The current, become a torrential flood, carried its author with it. Stein was no longer creating events, but following

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in their train — the decision had passed into the hands of generals and diplomats. From the signature of the treaties of Kalisz and Breslau his 1813 activities were throughout a function (in the mathematical sense) of the vicissitudes of the Allied arms. The advance of the Russian and Prussian forces brought under the authority of his Administrative Council Mecklenburg, the duchies of Anhalt and Altenburg, the Hanseatic towns and presently, after the flight of the Francophile king, Friedrich August, all Saxony. Established at Dresden, he set to work to attract the 'noble and loyal' Saxon people to the side of the Powers that were fighting for the independence of nations. And when, later, the Saxons changed sides on the very battlefield of Leipzig, the fact could have surprised no one who had not been blind to our man's underground activity in the army and the administration of that country.

But many months were to elapse before his activities were crowned with success. In the spring Napoleon's victories at Lützen and Bautzen and his triumphant entry into Dresden destroyed, for the moment, all that Stein had laboured to create. The Allied armies were driven back behind the Elbe. Scharnhorst, mortally wounded at Lützen, died without realizing his life's dream — to command, were it but for an hour, on a field of battle. And Stein found himself dispossessed of all the territories under his administration. 'The inhabitants of Bautzen,' writes Napoleon in his victory bulletin, 'are happy to be freed from Stein, Kotzebue and the Cossacks', and the old polemic reappears equally in the *Moniteur* of May 15th, which relegates 'the ill-famed Baron and his effort to rouse the *canaille* against the possessing classes, to the contempt of all decent people'.

Then came the long months of the Armistice, in which all military operations were at a standstill. 'I cannot picture to you,' wrote Prince Radziwill to his friend Stein, 'the

dejection and sorrow that one sees on every face, soldiers, burghers, women even. One and all, they are furious at the idea of an impending peace, for it could not possibly result in the freeing of Germany.' But Stein — inactive, embittered — excluded from diplomatic negotiations and dragging his impotence from Prague to Reichenbach and Reichenbach to Teplitz, from headquarters to headquarters — kept his optimism. 'Public spirit holds wonderfully,' he wrote to his wife on June 30th, 'armament is proceeding with the greatest vigour. Courage, perseverance, and trust in God! — the motto that the Emperor Alexander carries on his ring and that every right-thinking man should adopt.' At last the Armistice was denounced — Napoleon would not — or rather, perhaps, could not — seize the offered plank. On August 12th Stein wrote to Princess Radziwill: 'The important event of which news has arrived to-day opens up splendid prospects for us. Napoleon's furies will bring about his ruin. He is blinded by his pride, his contempt for men, and his rage at finding himself on the edge of the precipice. May we hurl him over it and see him engulfed, as an example to future generations, as a proof that Providence is beneficent and wise!'

Austria, Bavaria, Great Britain join the coalition, and Napoleon's saying that 'God is on the side of the big battalions' is confirmed. Close behind the Battle of the Nations, Stein is already in Leipzig on October 21st writing to his wife: '*Ma chère amie*, One dares to be happy. At last Napoleon is beaten and routed. He is being pushed to the other side of the Rhine and the Austro-Bavarian army will attack him before he is over. This is the result of the glorious combats of the 14, 16, 18 and 19 October. So much for the monstrous edifice cemented by the blood and tears of thousands of men and built by the most absurd and atrocious of tyrannies. He is overthrown, and Germany from end to end dares to proclaim that Napoleon is a criminal

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and the enemy of the human race, that the shameful fetters in which he has held our country are broken and that the ignominy with which he has covered us is washed out in torrents of French blood . . .'

On the same day on which Stein sent off this letter, a Convention was signed between the Emperors of Russia and Austria and the Kings of Prussia, Great Britain and Sweden for the purpose of fixing in advance the principles on which the newly-occupied territories were to be administered. The old Administrative Council created at Breslau on March 16th was out of date — it had been set up by Prussia and Russia only, and Stein, supported by the Tsar's friendship and the confidence of the whole Prussian delegation, had played the principal part in it. Now, the position was entirely changed; the new allies had to be taken into account, and the Council, as augmented by the representatives of Austria and the rest, was more than likely to become a focus of discord. A new organ, the Central Department, was therefore set up, under the supervision of a council of diplomats but in fact managed by one man on his own responsibility. We may easily guess who was the 'one man' chosen, and that he lost no time in getting to work.

Saxony being without a sovereign (for the King had been made prisoner at Leipzig) Stein replaced him by the Russian general Prince Repnin, who was under his own orders. The French prefecture of 'Bouches de l'Elbe'¹ and the Kingdom of Westphalia disappeared for ever. The Confederation of the Rhine was dissolved, the South German States joined the coalition. Every day, in fact, produced new successes and new preoccupations. 'We are working like five hundred Dutchmen,' wrote one of Stein's assistants. A uniform system had to be established for munitions

¹ In 1810 the limits of France proper, as distinct from its protectorates, had been extended to Oldenburg and the Hanse Towns. — TRANSLATOR.

of war, for hospitals. Order had to be re-established in, and supplies found for, districts devastated by troop movements. Monetary inflation had to be prevented. And all this had to be made effective through an imperfect bureaucratic machine, for it was laid down in the Convention that the existing local authorities were everywhere to be left undisturbed. The negotiations with the princes, too, consumed infinite time and the 'Commissions' accredited to their courts by Stein found it exceedingly difficult to bring about the acceptance of their chief's views.

Only a man of Stein's energy, experience and organizing capacity could have accomplished the Herculean task. But he had a group of devoted collaborators around him, most of them old personal friends — Gruner, who was to have managed the outbreak of 1812, now released from his Austrian prison and Governor of the Grand Duchy of Berg; Vincke, who had been at Stein's side in 1807-8 during the reform period and was now Governor of Westphalia; Arndt, his secretary in Russia, etc. — and with the aid of such men he triumphed (to the extent the situation allowed) over all difficulties.

It will suffice, as an indication of the magnitude of the achievement, to state that the Central Department succeeded in mobilizing 165,000 soldiers and Landwehrmen and 250,000 Landsturm in the petty states alone, over and above the Prussian, Austrian, Bavarian, Saxon and Hanoverian output.

At Frankfurt, where Stein set up his headquarters in November, it was the hour of triumph and even apotheosis. Most of the allied sovereigns were there also, fêtes were organized in their honour and all the 'princely rabble', as he called it, paid court to the all-powerful statesman and meekly endured the contempt that he did not fail to show. 'Stein kept the German princes waiting for hours,' noted the Englishman Jackson, 'and, when they do obtain the

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honour of an audience, treats them with a haughtiness that no Englishman who possessed an atom of self-respect would tolerate.'

The highest honours were paid to him by the allied monarchs. The Emperor Alexander showed his goodwill by nothing less than the Order of St. Andrew, which was usually reserved for sovereigns. Indeed, the sophisticated young aides-de-camp, for whom war's ups and downs were so many opportunities for amusement, had already found an appropriate designation for our hero. Henceforth he was known in the allied headquarters as 'Emperor of Germany'—and young German students, incapable of taking anything lightly, solemnly went to Professor Vogt and obtained from his authoritative lips the opinion that there was nothing in ancient Germanic law to prevent the elevation of the Reichsfreiherr to the throne of the Empire.

CHAPTER XIV

'I AM FORMING GOVERNMENTS IN FRANCE'

THE victorious troops of the Coalition had crossed the Rhine and invaded France, and behind them Karl vom Stein set foot on the soil of the 'hereditary enemy'.

These Frenchmen, whom he had hated so long and so doggedly, he did not know at all. Like most of his compatriots, he had worked up an artificial picture of the French character as an inharmonious mixture of levity and frivolity on the one hand and rapacity and desire for conquest and domination on the other, and his study of the atheist writers of the eighteenth century, and his few contacts with authentic Frenchmen — the *émigrés* of Koblenz, the arrogant victors of Jena — were scarcely calculated to correct these preconceived notions. But now it was the real face of France that was before him, the face of a hard-working peasant France, ruined by twenty years of disturbance and war, athirst for order and peace.

Stein's first reaction, just as Goethe's had been in the campaign of 1792 in France, was one of surprise. One need only read the letters he wrote to his wife from Langres on January 23rd and 27th, to see how deeply he was struck by the wretchedness of the French people. 'The country that we have passed through since leaving Basle is anything but beautiful, in fact dreary and infertile. The houses are poor, the chimneys badly built, the interiors dirty, and the inhabitants ill-favoured, dejected, mournful. Everywhere detestation of Napoleon is expressed, and people hope that

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Ces Messieurs (i.e. our armies) will destroy the scoundrel. A contrast, as you see, to the language of the Sénat, the Institut and the Corps Législatif! Peace is the only desire here, and many are declaring against Napoleon and for the Bourbons . . . The general apathy contrasts greatly with what we have been seeing in Germany.’ At the beginning of February he supplemented this recital with impressions of Troyes. ‘A large town, ill-built, full of beggars who are in reality manufacturers ruined by Napoleon’s administrative measures . . .’

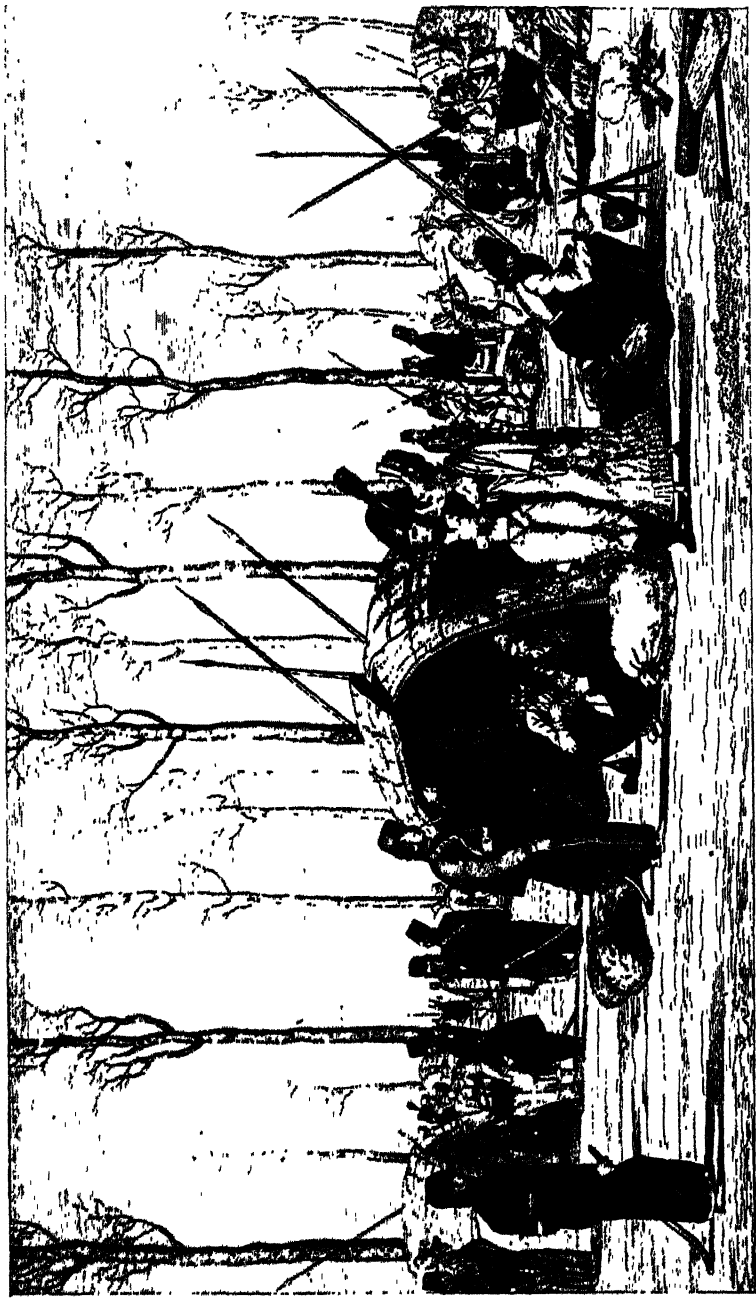
But Stein was not the man to soften, especially in the exceptional situation where Fate had placed him. Though he might feel a certain sympathy for the beaten enemy, another sentiment harder and fiercer welled up in him. For once, this man, so proud of his race and his rank, yet so humble as to his personal merits, gave way to a burst of legitimate pride. ‘I am now organizing governments in France,’ he triumphantly told his wife, ‘in spite of Napoleon and his proscription, his police and his bayonets!’ Some days later again, he could not resist returning to the subject. ‘What would you say, *ma chère amie*, if you saw me, me the proscribed of Napoleon, declared the Enemy of France, engaged in organizing governments in the twenty departments that we occupy, sending Alopaeus to Nancy to govern the Meurthe, Moselle, Meuse and Ardennes, proposing Sternberg to assist me at Paris, etc. You will find all this rather amazing! . . .’ Truly, the Providence to whom he ‘bowed and humbled himself’, had guided events in an extraordinary way. Conformably to the Convention of Leipzig, the occupied territories in France were under the administration of the Central Department, and as its president Stein was in very truth installing, if not ‘governments’, at any rate governors.

The great administrative schemes that Stein was putting into execution had been officially drawn up at Basle on

January 12th.¹ The occupied territory was divided into general governments. The officials, civil or military, placed at the head of these had the task of exploiting the resources of the country for the needs of the armies, establishing a police for the security of the troops, maintaining the lines of communication with the rear, and at the same time supervising all activities of the local authorities. 'A Council of Government' was to be formed in each such region, presided over by the Governor-General, and including the councillors and secretaries of the French prefectures. Stein had laid down the general principle that the subordinate personnel (including *sous-préfets* and *maires*) should be kept in office while the higher officials should be eliminated 'after they have been utilized'. He recommended his subordinates to be 'prudent with the gendarmerie', to keep up the secret police and to make use of all elements that were discontented with the Empire. There was passive resistance on the part of the population, who refused to pay their taxes to the enemy, and there were local risings, particularly in Lorraine. But, progressively as the armies advanced, Stein became, at least in name, the unchallenged master of a large part of the territory of France.

¹ Stein's brief stay in Switzerland yields some curious items of information. On January 13th he writes to his wife from Basle: 'Here I am, *ma chère amie*, three days in Switzerland, living in the house of the worthy Streckeisens on the bank of the Rhine, and making the acquaintance of many of the prominent people of the country, J. E. Landamann, Reinhard, Aloys Reding, M. de Mulinen, etc. . . . It is a new world, this little country, agitated by a thousand small irritations, consequences of the old revolution and of certain recent events, but it is certain that everything will settle down peacefully. (I assure you, one has to adjust one's point of view to a smaller horizon than usual if one is to take any interest in things here.) The people here are attractive—worthy and rational folk, well-mannered and well-educated. It is good to live among them. But it has to be said to their discredit that they think much more about their domestic discords than about the great affairs of nations. This passage through Switzerland makes me wish to make a longer stay as soon as circumstances permit. You will only need to rent a house in Berne, and then we can travel in the country during the good weather.'

In the sequel, Stein contributed to the consolidation of Switzerland by insisting on the independence of Geneva, which had been annexed to France by the Directory in 1798. Charles Pictet de Richemont, one of the Genevese delegates at the allied headquarters, became his secretary.



Russian troops bivouacking in the Champs Elysées, March 31, 1814

The memory of the sufferings undergone by the French population during the invasion of 1814 remained alive for generations. The exactions and violence of the allied troops seem to have gone far beyond the limits then permitted by military custom — pillage, rape, murder and arson were daily occurrences. But in fairness, our administrator of twenty departments cannot be held responsible for these misdeeds. He had only too good reason to know what the passage of the allied armies meant, for he had experienced it to his cost when, a few months earlier, they had traversed his Rhineland estates. (‘I believe the Cossacks have been at work on our land,’ he wrote to his wife on November 18th, 1813, ‘although Blücher sent a safeguard immediately.’) It was quite natural therefore that he should wish to do his best to relieve the crushing burdens of the people in his charge. He objected to laying contributions on the towns and the provinces, and went so far as to abolish certain unpopular taxes. But, all-powerful though he might be legally, the Chief of the Civil Government had no means of curbing the illegalities of Alexander’s Cossacks or of those Prussians whom Yorck himself called ‘a band of brigands’.

There is an autograph document written from the château of Policy, near Bar-sur-Seine, on March 20th (the eve of the fall of Paris) and addressed to the Emperor of Russia and the Chancellor Hardenberg, in which Stein expresses, frankly as always, his indignation at the indiscipline of the troops. ‘Particularly during great military movements, the marches and bivouacs the soldiers belonging to the transport parks allow themselves revolting excesses, and the military authority does not check or punish them. The deserted villages along the road, and the complaints of the inhabitants of every city that our troops have passed through bear witness to these enormities.’

As a wise statesman, too, he knew that such conduct by

the troops must have a deplorable effect on the spirit of the population. 'The disappearance of supplies, the destruction of means of transport, the exasperation of the people, and a mass rising in arms that will expel us from France — that will be the inevitable consequence.' He insisted on the urgent necessity of restoring discipline in the armies, not only as regards the stragglers and hangers-on but as to regularly formed bodies as well. But had this urgent appeal any effect? One may doubt it, for what could the Autocrat of All the Russias, the Chancellor of Prussia, the generals of all nations, do against the hordes let loose, except conclude peace?

But this was precisely the solution that Stein combated with all his might. He was profoundly convinced that the war could not, and should not, be ended short of the definitive overthrow of Napoleon and the restoration of the legitimate dynasty in France. To fight it out to the bitter end had always been his programme, and now, when success seemed within reach, was scarcely the moment for giving it up. *This* was the fundamental idea that he set about impressing on the allied counsels, exerting all his fire and powers to that end.

They were needed, for, as is well known, the campaign of 1814 on the allied side was one long series of hesitations and bickerings. Even before the Rhine had been crossed, *pourparlers* with France had been begun from Frankfurt, through the intermediary of a captured diplomat, M. de Saint Aignan. Then, the military chiefs had become intoxicated by the first successes of their troops, and the taking of Paris had seemed child's play. 'We are only sixteen short marches from Paris,' Stein was told on January 9th by his friend Gneisenau, Chief of Staff of the Army of Silesia. 'The confusion and depression in France are extreme. The conscripts are only joining very slowly. Muskets are lacking everywhere, and the dragoons have had to hand

in their carbines in consequence. Such troops cannot resist our men, and, besides, neither generals nor soldiers want to go on fighting.’ ‘We are on the road to Babylon,’ wrote Stein to his wife from Chaumont on January 30th, enjoining on her to come to the capital with the children, ‘in order to profit by the advantages that the situation provides.’

Ever the conscientious official, he was already working out principles for the administration of Paris under the occupation regime, and he proposed to the Tsar that General Balakhov should be the Prefect of Police.¹ But this was going too fast. Two whole months were to elapse before reaching the goal. And during these two months diplomacy alternated with the military operations. On the proposition of Caulaincourt (whose letter had reached headquarters on January 7th) a congress sat at Châtillon, from February 4th to March 19th, to discuss terms of peace. Meanwhile blood flowed on the battlefield, for the war that Gneisenau thought was over was only beginning for Napoleon. The genius of the great Corsican triumphed at Champaubert and Montmirail (February) and it was only between March 7th and March 25th that misfortune returned — Craonne, Laon, Fère-Champenoise — and only on March 31st that the entry of the allies into Paris signaled the definitive victory so long coveted.

French historians have not, in our view, sufficiently brought out the exceedingly important part played by Stein during this campaign, and particularly in the memorable days of January 26th, when the allied sovereigns arrived at Langres, and February 4th, when the Congress of Châtillon opened.

It is recognized on all hands that it was the will of the Tsar that negated each and every possibility of compromise. ‘Throughout the campaign, Alexander stands out

¹ See Pertz, *Stein*, III, 714.

alone among the Allied Sovereigns as the resolute supporter of energetic measures against Napoleon,' says his authorized biographer Schilder. With unshakable firmness Alexander never ceased to insist that, the continuation of military operations, through good fortune or ill, was the surest way to attain the Allies' objects and re-establish peace in Europe. What a contrast with the other Allied statesmen! the Prussians and Austrians always recoiling at the decisive moment, a Knessebeck declaring that the project of occupying Paris was only an empty bit of vanity, a Metternich fearing the aggrandizement of Russia more than anything else and always ready for shifty compromises.

But whence this iron will of the 'crowned Hamlet' Alexander? It has generally been assumed that the Tsar's resolution during the march on Paris was due to the preponderating influence of Pozzo di Borgo, and much has been made of the famous memorandum that he presented on February 15th. Incontestably, the part played by Pozzo in this period was important, but we are bound to recognize that at every moment Stein also was, at the least, a partner worthy of the Corsican politician. What we know of the relations between the Tsar and the Freiherr would justify so much merely *a priori*. But here, as in the case of 1812, there is more than hypothesis to go upon, for a whole series of documents bears witness to the steady and unceasing pressure that the German patriot, 'the Enemy of France', exercised on his august protector at this time.

First of all, he made himself the intermediary between the Tsar and the fiery generals of the Silesian Army, the Blüchers and Gneisenaus and Yorcks, whom the wily Metternich regarded as 'rank Jacobins'. 'I submit all your letters to the Emperor,' he wrote to Gneisenau from Langres on January 24th. 'The Emperor rejects the counsels of weakness with scorn. The tyrant will perish, the cause of liberty and justice will triumph.' And what Gneisenau

asked was definite enough. In his letter of January 9th, ‘I tremble with fear lest the Emperor Napoleon’s peace proposals be allowed to prevail, and that our triumphant march will be stopped. It is only at Paris that we can dictate the peace that the tranquillity of the nations requires. The centralization of all government in Paris makes the occupation of the capital by an enemy far more dangerous to France than to any other country. . . moreover, vengeance must not be forgotten, and we must repay the French for their visits to our capitals. So long as this is not done, our vengeance and our triumph are not complete. If the Silesian Army enters Paris first, I shall at once blow up the Austerlitz and Jena bridges as well as the Victory Column.¹ May God assist Your Excellency and give success to your counsels! When last year you advised carrying on the war without money and crossing the Niemen, you did a great thing that is now producing its fruits. Do not allow us to be sent home before the edifice is complete!’

The same tone in Gneisenau’s letter of February 2nd from Brienne, after the battle of La Rothière, ‘The last forces of the enemy will shortly be destroyed. . . I hope that we shall rise to higher conceptions and not make peace with a criminal.’ On February 6th, from Sondron (between Châlons and Arcy), Gneisenau outlines a whole programme in anticipation of the capture of Paris, inviting Stein to procure corn and other supplies at cheap rates, and advising the building of hutments around Paris at the expense of the French. ‘You know that the population of Paris consists in great part of people who possess nothing. Generally speaking, the Frenchman does not care to spend money unless it be for his pleasure and vanity, and for that reason we must avoid imposing the burden of housing the troops on the poorer classes of Paris.’ The Prussian general was a shrewd psychologist. ‘When the enemy takes position in front of

¹ i.e. the Vendôme Column.

Paris we must on no account throw bombs into the city. I know by experience¹ that that is the best way of reviving the garrison's courage.'

It is impossible to doubt that letters like these, with their high spirits, confidence and the will to win at any cost, had their effect on the Tsar's mind. And, if these letters were not enough, Stein's own comments would do the rest. Hardenberg writes in his journal at this time, 'Saw King Frederick William and the Emperor of Russia. Discussion of the plan of operations and misunderstandings. Stein intriguing for a direct push on Paris, which is what the Emperor Alexander also desires. The Austrian party is opposed. Others do not know what they want.' Finally, the Tsar categorically vetoed the armistice project put forward by Napoleon and supported by Metternich. And when, a few days later, he changed his mind, it was impossible to go back on his decision. This time it was Napoleon who rejected the armistice, and sealed his own fate.

Stein's own ideas ranged beyond the now assured victory. As we have seen, he regarded it as necessary not only to take Paris, but to finish once and for all with the House of Bonaparte and restore the Bourbon dynasty. So far, the Allies had not spoken as distinctly as he would have liked on this question. Alexander was not sympathetic to the Bourbons, openly preferring the House of Orléans or Bernadotte. For his part, Stein considered it imperative that a definitive programme should be announced without delay, stating the aims of the war, and establishing the Legitimist principle. How are we to account for his interest in the old French dynasty, which he had always felt and now displayed openly? Whence this love of the Bourbons in a man who so hated and derided the petty potentates of his own country, who were just as legitimate? The explanation is

¹ Gneisenau and the Burgomaster Nettelbeck had successfully defended Kolberg in the dark days of 1807. — TRANSLATOR.

that in Stein the national idea outweighed everything, and his statesmanship was high-minded enough for him to apply it to France not less than to Germany. The rule of the princelets was in his eyes a disfigurement of the fair face of the country that awaited its unifying emperor, but that of the Bourbons appeared to him the living and symbolic expression of the French soul.

The appearance of the Count of Artois at Vesoul, on French soil, increased Stein's impatience. 'The Count,' he records in his memoirs, 'was not to be permitted to take any decisive step, and lived therefore a very retired life. At the beginning of February he sent Count François d'Escars to the allied headquarters at Troyes. I supported his cause on every occasion that presented itself to me.' This activity on Stein's part culminated in a memoir to the Tsar, dated February 10th, and full of subtle argument. He expressed himself as certain that victory was at hand, and urged on the sovereign, who was 'on the point of finishing an inexpressibly glorious enterprise', the necessity of establishing in Europe 'a political order based on the principles of justice and morality'. The sole solution compatible with these principles was to 'restore to France her legitimate sovereign'. Certain of the effect of his words on the Russian autocrat, he boldly asserted that the 'House of Bourbon has done nothing to lose its right to the throne'. 'It is easy to prove,' he added, 'that France was never more flourishing and respected abroad than after the Peace of Versailles, a few years before the Revolution. . . . Louis XVI lost his throne, not because he conspired against his people's liberty and religion as James II did, but because he treated it with such self-assured recklessness and so little solicitude that he can only be called the most unfortunate of kings, and his nation the most criminal in history.'

In his capacity as Administrator of twenty departments, Stein claimed to be spokesman for the populations under

his care, and asserted that the co-operation of the Legitimist element might become one of the factors of victory. 'In proclaiming, Sire, your high intention, you will relieve the 12,000,000 Frenchmen who live in the territories occupied by your armies of all fear of the return of a cruel and exasperated tyrant. You will have their co-operation in administrative affairs. They will come out of the stupor into which the present situation has thrown them, and they will express their opinion freely and eagerly.'

More, would not the Tsar, in thus laying the foundations of the new order in France, secure *ipso facto* his own ascendancy over the legitimate successor of Louis XVI? 'The new monarch of France will assuredly follow only the counsels of the august sovereign to whom he owes his throne, and will adopt his Liberal ideas without hesitation.' Alexander, the disciple of La Harpe, the 'Saviour of Europe', could not possibly remain insensible to such arguments, all the less when Pozzo di Borgo took up the tale a few days later and proclaimed — sometimes using Stein's very words — that 'the achievement of Europe's deliverance' would become, thanks to the restoration of the Bourbon dynasty, 'the grandest example of justice and morality'.

Stein's pleading was beyond question adroit, but, as an experienced statesman, he could hardly expect that his ideas would win outright. The diplomats of the Coalition, regarding the issue of the struggle as still doubtful, and hypnotized by the genius of their adversary, aimed chiefly at an immediate peace on the basis of the 1792 frontiers. The restoration of the Bourbons did not greatly interest them, for why impose on the French a dynasty that they seemed to have forgotten for twenty years? Alexander had to reckon with a united front of the Chancelleries. It was already a great success for our hero, therefore, when Alexander declared that after mature consideration he had disinterested himself in the Orléans and Bernadotte

candidatures, and would not now oppose any obstacle to a popular movement in favour of the Legitimate dynasty. And it was a still greater triumph when this policy was adopted by the entire Coalition in the Convention signed at Troyes on February 14th.

But at this precise moment the tidings arrived of those new victories of Napoleon's that gave fresh heart to France and rallied her again to the Emperor. It was scarcely possible to resume the pro-Bourbon campaign until the military situation should have changed anew. For Stein it was a heart-rending moment. His Russian secretary, Nikolai Turgeniev, tells us that he was uneasy, fractious, impatient, neglectful of current business, which he left largely to the Prussians and Austrians. . . .

Weeks dragged past before Stein had another opportunity of intervening in the domestic affairs of France. But on the morrow of Napoleon's disasters of Craonne and Laon, he received a long report from his subordinate Alopaeus concerning the arrival of the Count of Artois at Nancy. 'His Royal Highness is pleased beyond words with his reception and his stay,' reported the Russian Governor-General of Lorraine. 'He is so convinced that the counter-revolution will start from here that he has already drawn up a proclamation. It has, however, not yet been circulated; opinions have been sounded, and Monsieur has been advised to postpone its issue for some days. . . . Certainly, great numbers of people here are afraid that the ghost will come back, but what makes them hesitate most of all is the Congress of Châtillon. . . . It is certain that if the Allied Powers decide to declare for the Bourbons, they would have almost the whole of France with them. . . . Yes, I venture to say that with this talisman I could present you with four or five of the fortresses in my Government.'¹

¹ The occupation of the open country, of course, still left the fortresses in Napoleon's hands. — TRANSLATOR.

Left without instructions as he was, Alopaeus maintained an extreme reserve. 'I have not permitted the wearing of the white cockade. I have done nothing that might affirm the legitimacy of the Bourbons.' But he was convinced that it would be difficult to keep up this neutrality for long, and pressed his chief to indicate the line he was to follow.

Alopaeus's letter arrived at the right moment. With Napoleon's last reverses, the pro-Bourbon agitation in the allied camp had started afresh and with a new intensity. At Dijon, the 'civil' headquarters, Stein was at the focus of all the intrigues. On March 29th he received a mysterious and anonymous letter in these terms: 'A Frenchman from Paris, where Monsieur de Stein is greatly admired, desires a secret interview with him. He addresses himself particularly to him because he regards him as the man who has watched the events in Europe from the most enlightened and general point of view of anyone.'¹ The writer was Mathieu de Montmorency, who, with M. de Montagnac, wished to approach the German statesman on behalf of the monarchists — a priceless trump in Stein's hand! The same day he wrote to Alopaeus: 'I can answer your Excellency quite positively, after reaching agreement with the persons concerned in this affair [Stein had in fact settled matters with Hardenberg]. The Powers have decided to favour the Bourbons, and are agreeing with them on the principles of the proclamation, which you will then circulate by all the means at your disposition. You are authorized not only to permit the wearing of the white cockade, but even the formation of a French headquarters and armed corps, for which purpose you may advance 200,000 francs to a Royal Military Chest. One is overjoyed that this detestable Congress of Châtillon is broken off, and that we have returned to the right lines and intend to overthrow

¹ Pertz, *Stein*, III, 571 (Text in German).

the tyrant. Try now to start your negotiations for possession of the fortresses, which should be handed over to the Bourbons, who should make use of the rallies of the peasants according to their interests and the interests of France. God will bless our cause, because we are doing homage to justice and morality. Offer my respects to the Count of Artois and tell him how glad I am to be able to act openly and effectively for his cause [which is] that of right and honour.’

Thus, at the moment when the fate of Napoleon was being decided before Paris, Stein’s ideas were triumphant all along the line. ‘Napoleon has been thwarted,’ he writes to his wife on April 2nd, ‘the man is down. . . . Lyons has just mounted the white cockade, and quite likely the same is happening in Paris.’ And, three days later: ‘You will already know, *ma chère amie*, by the direct courier, that Paris has been occupied. Let us thank Heaven for this great and happy event, and offer our profound homage and eternal gratitude to the Emperor Alexander, the head of this grand enterprise from which the palingenesis of Europe dates.’

Next day, impatient of waiting, he set out for the capital under the escort of a couple of Cossacks.

Already Alexander had sanctioned the dethronement of the Bonapartes and the restoration of the Legitimate dynasty.

Stein’s first letter to his wife from Paris is a human document of great psychological interest, showing as it does the reactions of this pure-blooded and representative German on first contact with *la Ville-Lumière*. As of old Luther at Rome, so Stein at Paris remained completely indifferent to the aesthetic charms of the Latin civilization. ‘The city is not beautiful,’ he declares in his peremptory way, ‘some districts are so, but the greater part of it is

composed of dirty, narrow and smelly streets.' He no longer thinks of sending for his wife and children, his one desire being to get back to his own home as quickly as possible. 'I shall bless the day when I can return to Germany.' The old hatred of the 'impure, impudent and immodest race of the French' burst out afresh, and with greater intensity than ever. 'It disgusts one to see how this race, after wallowing in crime, talks about its loyalty, its kindness, its generosity, as though it had never filled Europe with blood and mourning . . . a nation that in two centuries has murdered three kings.'

Against Napoleon, Stein's invective now knows no bounds. 'The tyrant has ended as a coward. He has not had the courage to die bravely. He accepts a pension (*sic*) and returns into nothingness.' All the gossip of Paris about the fallen sovereign is faithfully retailed: 'He has gone hunting, he only thinks of his personal enjoyment; he passes his day in tears and groans. . . . What a monster, and what degradation!' A grievous letter, and one that discloses the abysmal depth of the incomprehension between the two peoples! One thing, and only one, reconciles us with our hero — the humility with which, at this height of fame, he bows down before the Providence that has granted to him to reach after so many desperate struggles 'this degree of happiness, independence and tranquillity'. 'It is only on comparing the sentiment which has filled my whole being with the weight of suffering that I have borne for nine years, that I can measure the extent of my present happiness. . . .'

In spite of his desire to return to Germany as quickly as possible, he was obliged, as responsible for the administration of the occupied territory, to prolong his stay in the capital until the signature of the Peace Treaty. He lived at Paris, in the train of the Emperor Alexander, attentively watching events, but taking no active part in them. He

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renewed his old 1793 relations with the Count of Artois, who on his side showed ‘great goodwill and confidence’. The impending re-entry of ‘a King who was legitimate, moral and human’ filled the old German puritan’s heart with joy. Nevertheless, he had his misgivings as to the future; ‘God grant that King Louis XVIII be happy on his throne! . . . I hope that the sentiments that are displayed towards the Bourbons will be as lasting as the demonstrations that express them are noisy. The levity of the nation, its demoralization, cause me to fear fresh agitations.’ Stein was well aware of the dangers attending a prolonged occupation of the capital by the allied troops, for the example of the German towns was fresh in his memory. ‘The self-respect of the nation is humiliated in seeing itself beaten and the foreigner in the capital. The army is furious. . . . Crowds of officials have lost their posts. . . . And all this goes to make up a mass of dramas, intrigues and agitations.’

Peace signed, he left Paris on June 3rd, one day later than the Tsar. His own horses rapidly conveyed him by Meaux and Châlons to Luxemburg, where he modestly took the post-coach. In the late evening of June 10th, Baron vom Stein reached his native town of Nassau. He had left it seven years before in answer to the call of Frederick William and Louise, to help them at the moment of deepest distress. How many things had happened since that day! He had been dictator and renovator of Prussia. Proscribed, declared an outlaw, put to the ban of European society, he had presently become the adviser of a mighty emperor, and presently again the instigator of Germany’s uprising. And so it was in triumph that to-day he re-entered the peaceful little town that had given him birth. For once the curfew was forgotten. All the population was up to hail the greatest and most famous of Nassau’s sons. The Landsturm men, the citizen soldiers whom he had called to arms for

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the defence of their country, lined the streets, the bells rang their loudest and a huge firework piece lighted the sky. And at last he came to the old house, abandoned and almost uninhabitable, where his sister Marianne, Canoness of Wallerstein and faithful guardian of the family hearth, awaited him alone. Calm, repose, oblivion, dreams. . . .

CHAPTER XV

THE END OF A DREAM

'The Reich is the age-long dream of the Germans. It is difficult to give a logical explanation of the content of this idea of the Reich; only a German can wholly grasp it. The notion synthesizes a whole range of ideas and sentiment, mystic, religious and political. The struggle for the Reich is the fundamental idea of the whole of German history. . . . The Reich is an eternal goal that can never be definitely reached, it is a process of growth, long, painful, and never ended. The building of the Reich is imposed on us by the power of Destiny. . . . The Reich has had unnumbered prophets; it is thanks to them that in the most tragic moments of the nation's history the sacred fire kindled by the idea of the Reich has never been extinguished.'

Berliner, Tageblatt, May 4th, 1934.

GERMANY was liberated, Napoleon fallen from power. And in the intoxication of the moment Stein might well have believed that his work was finished. But was it so? Was it not merely the negative part of our statesman's policy that had come to fulfilment? The external obstacles to a reconstruction of the Germanic Empire were indeed removed, but was not this empire itself, as in the past, but a dream?

Throughout his long and chequered career, the vision of a Germany united and strong had haunted him. The medieval legends in which he had been cradled had left an indelible spiritual impress on this child of the ancient Rhenish chivalry. In the choice of a career, in the decision to enter the service of Prussia, he had been guided by this

instinctive attachment to the Imperial idea. The old Empire being dead, the essential purpose of his political activities was the building of a new one.

When he set himself to bring to life the dormant forces of the nation in a Hohenzollern setting, he was serving purely the German cause. And when, after thirty years' service, he had to take the road of exile, the last tie that attached him to the House of Brandenburg in particular was broken.

'I regret,' wrote Stein to Münster from St. Petersburg, under date of December 1st, 1812, 'that you suspect the Prussian in me and disclose the Hanoverian in yourself. *I have only one country, and that is Germany.* According to the ancient constitution, I belong to her only and not to any special territory, and to her I have vowed all the attachment of my heart. In this moment, when such great events are unfolding themselves, dynasties are completely indifferent to me. My desire is that Germany should be great and strong, that she should reconquer her independence and keep it in her particular situation between France and Russia. This is in the interest, not only of the nation, but of all Europe. But, if we are to achieve this, we cannot stick to ancient and obsolete forms, any more than nowadays one creates a fortress system with feudal castles and crenellated walls.'

The historical importance of this profession of faith might escape the casual reader, for we are all too ready to project into any given past ideas that we have acquired more lately. Stein's celebrated and oft-quoted words, 'I have only one country, and that is Germany', sound to-day banal, almost platitudinous. But at the moment when he wrote them, they constituted a bold and unconventional programme, similar to that which, centuries before, Joan of Arc had proclaimed in a France that had politically ceased to exist.



'Bon voyage'

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From the moment when, in 1806, Francis of Habsburg had decreed the dissolution of the ancient empire, Germany had been no more than a 'geographical expression'. 'The Germans have no town, and even no country, of which it can truly be said that "here is Germany",' said Goethe one day to his faithful Eckermann. 'When I hear people talking about an "all" that is lost', wrote the same Goethe to Zelter on July 17th, 1807, 'well, since no one in Germany has ever seen, still less cared about this "all", I am seized with impatience and I have to make an effort not to seem rude and inconsiderate.'

In such conditions the programme sketched by Stein in his letter to Münster must have seemed a political fantasy. Now, some fantasies are harmless, but this of Stein's was, in the eyes of his contemporaries, definitely dangerous and revolutionary. In so far as it merely aimed at 'turning the French out of Germany'¹ there might still have been agreement, for the feebleness of the governors had been conquered by the torrential force of national passions. But afterwards? The unification of Germany as Stein saw it was incompatible with the sovereignty of the German princes. To erect the empire it would be necessary to overthrow some thirty dynasties, and in this respect the traditional statesman, piously attached as he was to the medieval heritage, held out a hand to the most desperate Jacobin.

From that day in January 1804 when he had issued his famous challenge to the Duke of Nassau, he had vowed to the small princely houses, one and all, an unrelenting hatred. Incapable of any impulse of servility, he might have taken as his creed the famous words of Schiller's Marquis Posa, *Ich kann nicht Fürstendiener sein* (I cannot be a prince's servant). As a Prussian official and minister, he

¹ The phrase reads coldly in English, but for French readers it has the historic ring of Joan of Arc's summons to the King of England, 'Je suis ci-envoyée pour vous bouter hors de toute France'. — TRANSLATOR.

always maintained towards his sovereign an attitude of stern independence, and on occasion he would, as we have seen, deal with Frederick William of Hohenzollern as equal to equal. While he abstained from public criticism of the King, in private he said what he thought. 'The King is restive, jumping on everyone he sees more or less' (Stein to his wife, November 18th, 1813). 'The King is cold, he has only half-intentions, he has confidence neither in himself nor in his people' (Stein to Alexander, March 11th, 1813). Nevertheless he retained a certain tenderness for this man with whom he had so long shared the cares of power, and who personified in his eyes the glorious Prussian tradition that meant so much for the future of all Germany.

But for the other sovereigns he felt only hatred and contempt, and in his intimate correspondence he expressed it without reserve. 'The King of Saxony is proud, weak, obstinate,' he confided to Nesselrode on April 11th, 1813. 'We have here all the princely rabble, as absurd as it is despicable and despised,' he wrote to his wife from Frankfurt on November 27th, 1813. 'The most ridiculous and at the same time the most detestable of them, is the Württemberg tyrant, monstrous in body, in pride, in poltroonery, in crapulous living . . . all the other *princillons* are weaklings, who are all amazed at being so considerably treated and permitted a more honourable existence than their miserable conduct entitles them to.'

'Everywhere in Germany,' he wrote on another occasion, 'one sees enthroned basenesses; the people just regard them either as cowardly fugitives, deaf to the obligations of honour and duty, or else as titled slaves who have been given, out of charity, a precarious existence that is paid for by the blood and money of their subjects.'

Arndt, in his souvenirs of Russia, records a memorable scene of which he was an eyewitness, when Stein expressed

his feelings about the princes with uncommon force and frankness. At a banquet given by the Dowager Empress to celebrate one of the Russian victories, the august hostess herself exclaimed at a certain moment, 'Now, if a single Frenchman escapes beyond the frontiers of Germany, I shall be ashamed of being a German woman.' At these words, says Arndt, Stein was transported with anger. His face crimson, he rose, and bowing to the empress told her, in a voice choked with emotion, 'Your Majesty does very wrong in using such words about the great nation, the brave and valiant nation to which your Majesty has the honour to belong. You should rather have said, I am ashamed, not of the German people, but of my brothers and cousins the German princes. I lived on the Rhine in 1791 to 1795, the people was in no way to blame; it is you princes that did not know how to employ it aright. If the German kings and princes had done their duty, no Frenchman would ever have crossed the Elbe, the Oder, the Vistula, and least of all the Niemen.' The courtiers were dumbfounded, but to their astonishment the Empress remained pensive. 'Perhaps you are right, Baron, and I thank you for the lesson you have given me.'

But if this remarkable story carries its own moral, it does not contain quite the whole of Stein's political idea. For even if the German princes had possessed the most elevated moral qualities and patriotic feelings, he would none the less have regarded them as a national pest. 'The division of Germany into numerous and powerless states has deprived the nation of the feeling of dignity and independence,' he wrote during his Bohemian exile: 'it has diverted their activities from great national interests to petty local preoccupations; it has given scope to the craving for titles, to vanities and to the spirit of intrigue, for which a vast field of activity is open in these innumerable little courts'. Stein was convinced that the salvation of Germany

lay in unification. A great man who could bring this about would be hailed by the entire nation.

Did Stein himself hope to be this great man? Did he dream of one day wearing the Imperial Crown, and assuming of right the title given him in sarcasm by the young Russian aides-de-camp? No one can say. He himself never disclosed any such ambition. But in the circumstances of the time, it was not at all inconceivable. As the Empire itself did not exist, one daydream was as legitimate as another, and after the Napoleonic earthquakes anything was possible. 'The old dynasties will perish, there is a curse on the princes,' wrote Gneisenau in 1811, and Count von der Groeben of the Prussian General Staff wrote to the same Gneisenau, 'all Germany awaits a liberator, a saviour, and if this national hero can, at the same time, overthrow the kings and princes and act as a single head, the people will find regeneration and pardon for all its sins'. The Archduke Charles, himself a member of the most powerful dynasty of Germany, declared once that 'the German world cannot be saved but by a man who is not a born prince'.

But enough of these speculations. It was not the question of persons, but that of principle, that interested Stein. In his eyes the reconstitution of the Germanic empire was not a bright vision of the future but a definitely attainable political object. This conviction, deep-seated already in his soul, was fortified now that he was sure of the powerful support of Alexander, and now that the 'unforeseeable event', for which he had vainly waited in his three years' Bohemian exile, had actually happened.

✕ All through the period when he was working with the Tsar, all through the long triumphal way from St. Petersburg to Paris, he had never, even for an instant, lost sight of this final goal. On the morrow of Borodino, when the eyes of Europe could not yet discern the issue of the battle

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of giants, he presented a memoir to the Tsar which, though succinct, is remarkable for depth of historical insight. In it, Stein indicated the necessity for reconstructing Germany on a new basis. To restore the ancient constitution, the system of the Treaty of Westphalia, would in his view be disastrous in the extreme. 'Germany could only make a feeble resistance to France, it would remain split up among secondary authorities, whose existence destroys all feeling of dignity in a great people.' The Constitution of 1802, dictated by France, he criticized even more severely, in that by abolishing the ecclesiastical princes and the imperial cities, and augmenting the power of a few princely houses, it deprived the Emperor of all influence and all machinery for vigorous government. Hence he thought it infinitely more in accordance with the interests of Europe that a new empire should be founded (a Second Reich as we should say) 'containing all the moral and physical elements of strength, liberty, and enlightenment, and able to cope with the restless ambition of France'. In sum, it was the old Hohenstaufen Empire that he wished to revive — he had said, indeed, not long before, 'If I had the magic power of setting Germany up again in its glory, it would be among the great Emperors of the tenth to the thirteenth centuries that I would look for my ideal'. But he was shrewd enough to perceive that this ideal programme would encounter insurmountable obstacles, and he ended, therefore, with the conclusion that 'if the re-establishment of the old monarchy is impossible, then even the partition of Germany between Austria and Prussia would be preferable to the re-establishment of the late constitution'. He would even admit that, as a sop to *amours propres*, some princely territories might be allowed to continue, as confederates of Austria or Prussia.

A year later, at the end of August 1813, Stein submitted to the Tsar, at Prague, a second memorial on the German constitution. The situation was no longer the same. Part

of the territory of Germany was already liberated, and the total expulsion of the French had come within the field of possibilities, but at the same time a fresh danger had arisen, in that the German princes, who but now had been Napoleon's servile vassals, were beginning to raise their heads. Though they had never been fully sovereign under the old Empire, and even less so in the Confederation of the Rhine, they now claimed recognition of sovereign rights as the price for coming into the struggle against France. In other words, the liberation of Germany was to end in the definitive legalization of her dividedness.

This was exactly the contrary of Stein's aims, and had to be prevented at any cost. He therefore set to work to prove to Alexander, first of all, that the partition of Germany in thirty-six distinct sovereignties was 'pernicious for the liberty and morality of the nation'. 'Under the old Empire,' he wrote, 'the powers of the princes were limited as regards taxation and the liberties of the individual. With all these limitations abolished, fifteen million people will be at the mercy of the arbitrary will of thirty-six petty despots.' Secondly, it would be the reverse of tranquillity for Europe. 'It would perpetuate the influence of France over fifteen million people, and would enable that country to direct its effort, steadily and stubbornly, against its rival, Russia.' To preserve Russia for ever against 'a destructive invasion of her frontiers' it was indispensable, he held, to set up a barrier between the Muscovite Empire and 'this ambitious, restless and perfidious France'. And the only way to secure this object was through the unification of Germany. The rest of the programme followed from these premises. 'The sovereignty of the thirty-six despots will be set aside in favour of the ancient territorial overlordship of the Emperor. The Princes will be deprived of the right of war and peace, which will be transferred to the Diet and the Emperor. To

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the latter will be delegated the executive power, the supervision of the Courts of Law, the collection of taxes, and military institutions. The legislative power will be entrusted to the Diet and the Emperor.¹ The Imperial dignity would be conferred on Austria, but at the same time, means must be found to 'attach her strongly to Germany and to give her internal strength enough for her to co-operate in defence without exhausting herself or endangering her political existence. . . . Prussia should have a population of eleven millions, and her relations with Germany should be those of a state of that empire and a guarantor of its Constitution'. To bring Prussia to this level of power, then, Stein considered it necessary to give her an increase of territory. He did not specify to Alexander what these new acquisitions should be, but in a German translation of the memorial, for Hardenberg's use, he was more explicit. Prussia should receive Mecklenburg, Holstein and Electoral Saxony.

Throughout these two great memorials, one feels, behind the official eloquence, that Stein is forcing himself to keep strictly to practical politics. And, alas, there was still a residue of unreality. For all his experience of administration and government, we see him, on this matter of German unity, as the victim of an illusion. It is the tragedy of the prophet who proclaims a vision of the future to a world incapable of understanding.

For such a vision to become reality, it would have been necessary above all that it should have the support of a powerful party. But in the Germany of that time political life, in the modern sense, was still non-existent. To flock to the Volunteer colours and die heroically, musket in hand, was the most that the flower of German youth could do. It would have been useless to ask it to take its part in

¹ An Anglo-Saxon will ask here, had Stein studied the then fresh Constitution of the United States and the discussions that had preceded its adoption? — TRANSLATOR.

well-weighed political action, for of that it was incapable. And for the realization of its own ideas, vague and nebulous as they were into the bargain, it did not possess the means.

On the other hand the men in place, the holders of power, could not but be horrified by the Steinian ideas. The princes, big and little, along with their ministers and their entourages, had quickly discerned in him an enemy, and an enemy the more formidable in that he had the powerful backing of the Russian Emperor. At the very beginning of 1813, they had set up a dull die-hard resistance, and the baron, as usual, did his best to embitter the struggle by his intransigence. A letter of his to Princess Radziwill, dated April 12th, 1813, enables us to see the way in which he thought of, and acted towards, these very real influences. 'Passing through Breslau,' he wrote, 'I stopped for a day, and I was struck by the impudence of the wretches who are still about the (Prussian) Court. Prince Wittgenstein [the addressee of the famous interrupted letter] suggested, through Hardenberg, that he would like to see me. The answer I conveyed was that my door was only open to honourable men.' And, after pouring the same contempt on another grandee, Prince Hatzfeldt, he concluded, 'These are wretches whom one has to overwhelm with scorn and opprobrium. I ask your pardon for speaking of those insects.'

And yet among those 'insects', among these actual directors of policy in Germany, there were some who, though they did not share the Steinian idea in its totality, envisaged none the less—and as definitely as he did—the necessity of stopping the atomization of the nation's forces and of creating a bond of some kind between the thirty-six principalities. But their idea was federalist and legitimist, and they looked to some sort of a league of princes. The most intelligent and influential advocate of this solution was the great publicist Gentz. His scheme was to divide

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Germany 'into two great confederations, united to each other by an alliance in perpetuity, the one under the protectorate of Austria and the other under that of Prussia. The members of these two Federations would keep all sovereign rights except that they would have to conform to a single military system.' In his ten years of service in Austria, Gentz had obtained a considerable following in that country, whereas Stein's ideas were highly unpopular there. And in fact it was in the Austrian camp, in the person of Count Clement von Metternich himself, the most eminent representative of court and conservative tradition, that the Steinian policy was to encounter its most dangerous opponent.

It is easy to imagine the lofty smile with which the impassive minister of the Habsburgs must have read the eager memoirs of the one-time outlaw and present hanger-on of the Russian headquarters.¹ Against such an adversary, what could Stein do? He complained of Metternich's 'frivolous and self-sufficient spirit and his disregard of method'. Writing on December 30th, 1813, he said, 'There is every reason to fear that Count Metternich will bring into the final settlement of German affairs the same lack of respect for truth and principle that has partly upset them already, and that he has just shown in so mischievous a way in Switzerland'. This to Alexander, in whom Stein saw his final resource. But what was the value of Alexander's support?

From the point of view of a German, Alexander, with his grenadiers and his cossacks, was no more than a useful auxiliary in the struggle against the common enemy. In casting him for the grander part of Deliverer, Stein grievously deceived himself, for was not even he, Stein,

¹ Metternich disclaimed all hatred of Stein — 'Love and hatred of personalities are weaknesses that do not affect my way of conducting affairs' — and merely classed him among the 'impressionable people', a phrase that in his mouth implied supreme disdain.

suspect in the eyes of the patriots because of his official position as a Russian dignitary.

Nor could he count on Alexander's supporting him against all and sundry. The attachment of the great Catherine's versatile grandson was only a passing sentiment. So long as it was a matter of detaching Prussia from, and of rousing the German nation against, Napoleon, the counsels of our hero were invaluable. But, in proportion as the struggle with the Corsican broadened, the divergence between the political aims of Alexander and those of Stein became more and more evident. Stein wished above all to strengthen Germany, to set her on her feet, and to disengage her from all external pressure from whatever direction. But the Tsar had tasted strong wine in the great victories of 1813 and 1814. Having been the Liberator of Europe, he already saw himself as its Protector. More and more he gave way to the promptings of mystical sentiment, and thought of himself as the instrument of a Divine Will that had chosen him to overthrow the Beast of the Apocalypse, to restore peace and concord on earth, to re-establish thrones and vindicate outraged law. Gradually, insensibly, the paths of the two men, which had coincided at a certain moment, parted in divergent directions. Alexander might, and did, shower titles, orders and honourable distinctions on the baron, but their former intimacy was waning fast.

Further, Alexander, who was after all an astute politician, must have early realized that the programme presented to him by the German statesman contained quite inadmissible contradictions. For one thing, here was this Stein obstinately defending the Legitimist principle in France and trampling on it without hesitation as applied to his own country. For another, the admirer of the great Hohenstaufen Emperors, the partisan of a strong authority, was offering the Imperial Crown to the House of Austria,

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which did not deserve it and did not want it. And lastly, the same man who was insisting on the necessity of aggrandizing Prussia by giving her new territories would have the Hohenzollerns put under the aegis of the Habsburgs!

In truth, an impartial judgment cannot but admit that Stein's programme was insecure in its foundations. As early, indeed, as his letter of 1804 to the Duke of Nassau, he had spoken of unifying Germany by dividing it between Austria and Prussia, and since then he had plunged deeper and deeper into the complexities of this illogicality.¹ He proposed for the Imperial Crown the House that had just given it up. He assigned the principal place in the Empire to a nation which included vast numbers of Slavs and Magyars, and whose frontiers marched with those of Turkey and Poland. On the other hand, to give the primacy to the Hohenzollerns was too bold and new an idea — as yet no one thought of such a thing — and Stein therefore relegated Prussia to a back seat. But Prussia was inordinately ambitious, and her ambitions had received fresh nourishment from the reforms of 1808 and the uprising of 1813. The proposed situation was psychologically impossible, and Stein himself cannot have entirely failed to see it, for at times he proposed that Prussia should have a special status within the Empire as guarantor of its constitution, and later, at the Congress of Vienna, he went further still and proposed in effect that the King of Prussia should be the real holder of the central power, the effective regent of the Empire, while the glamour and pomp of the Imperial Dignity should fall to the Habsburgs.¹ Could absurdity go further?

¹ 'If one allows,' he wrote on February 17th, 1815, 'that Austria has fewer interests in Germany than in Prussia, and that, even within herself, she contains principles that tend towards separation, and if at the same time one believes that the union of Austria and Germany is indispensable for the latter and advantageous to the political interests of Europe — then one must surely agree that it is necessary to create a constitutional link uniting Austria to Germany, giving her a considerable influence, a preponderance,' in other words the Imperial Crown.

It was given to Stein to state the problem but not to solve it. It was only in 1866 and 1871 that Bismarck found and, by 'blood and iron', imposed a solution, and that was a temporary one. Even to-day the definitive solution has not yet been found.

Thus Stein's effort, whatever forms it took, was doomed to defeat, and its triumph of 1813 turned inevitably into failure.

At the precise moment, when outwardly the most brilliant success crowned his career, the *Via Dolorosa* was beginning. During the year 1813, when he was governing vast territories as an autocrat and princes and courtiers crowded his antechamber, he began already to sense the collapse of his dream. Never had his entourage found him so irascible and touchy; as early as April Princess Radziwill wrote, 'They complain at Dresden of the quick temper of M. de Stein, who cannot restrain the ardour of his character; unhappily I see from the last letter to me that he has become very embittered'. Quarrels arose between him and some of his most loyal and devoted friends — Schön, Niebuhr, Humboldt — and more and more he felt a lonely and misunderstood man. Nikolai Turgeniev, his devoted young assistant and enthusiastic admirer, wrote in his journal on March 31st, 1814, 'Observing Stein at close quarters, one is tempted to forgo all ambition. Here is a man who lives surrounded by eyewitnesses of his great merits and great achievements, but those who should be sensible of the distance that separates them from him do not like him. Perhaps he alienates some by his impatience, his frankness. But is it fair to fasten on such defects when one is dealing with a man of so grand a spirit, so noble a character and so kind a heart? . . . Stein said to me recently, "sometimes when I look deeply into a man sitting in front of me, I seem to see a wolf"'. That is all the thanks he gets from his colleagues for his merits and his good deeds.'

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'Man is not made for happiness,' Stein said to him on another occasion.

By the autumn of 1813 the impossibility of realizing Stein's Prague programme, even in its main lines, had become evident. From the moment that the allied Powers resigned themselves to recognizing the sovereignty of the Kings of Bavaria and Württemberg as the price of their adhesion to the league against Napoleon, Stein had lost the game. But he was not the man to despair. At Fribourg in December 1813, he once more addressed Alexander, urging the formation of a Committee 'to carry out the preparatory work for the definitive settlement of German affairs' and to draw up 'the plan of constitutional reunion'. As to the composition of this Committee, Stein's ideas were somewhat strange. Humboldt would represent Prussia and Count Stadion Austria, but in order to counteract the 'baneful' influence of Metternich, Alexander was also to be represented, and by two delegates, namely Count Razumovski and himself. In other words, the destinies of Germany were to be settled in a meeting in which Russia would have a vote equal to that of the two great German powers. Alexander rejected these sanguine proposals on the ground that it was impossible to provoke Austria at the very moment when she was most needed.

In the course of the campaign in France, the question of the future constitution of Germany again came to the front. A separate and secret article was inserted in the Treaty of Chaumont, by which the Allies 'undertook to direct all their efforts to the real re-establishment of the following system in Europe, namely, Germany composed of sovereign princes united by a federal bond which will assure and guarantee the independence of Germany'. In fact, a compromise — Germany would be united, while at the same time the independence of its component parts would be maintained.

Stein was nevertheless exultant: 'I am certain that our country will have a constitution that will put a brake on the power of all these miserable despots.' And at once he submitted a new memorial to the Tsar which outlined something like a German Magna Charta. The treaty of federation was to serve also as a means of limiting the powers of the thirty-six sovereigns. 'No man may be judged by his natural judges, or be detained for more than 48 hours without being brought before them, so that they can decide on the reasons of his arrest. Every man shall have the right to emigrate, and to choose the civil or military service of Germany if he wishes.¹ Every man and every corporation has the right to cause his or its complaints against authority to be printed.' Provincial Estates would sit in every state of the Confederation, and a Diet with extensive powers at the centre. The executive power would be entrusted to a Directorate, in which not only Prussia and Austria, but also Bavaria and Hanover would be represented. This proposition, which was quite new, was meant chiefly to flatter the *amour propre* of England and her Hanoverian dynasty. But it left wholly in suspense the thorny question of the presidency.

German historians have attached great importance to this Chaumont memorial, with its draft of a German 'Declaration of the Rights of Man'. But the immediate effect of Stein's move was certainly very limited. The Council of Allied Ministers at Dijon affirmed the 'necessity of establishing the individual rights of all Germans and the maximum of privilege for the Diets of States forming part of the Confederation'. England proclaimed through Count Münster that 'Germany, which had done everything for its liberation, deserved a real act of justice'. And there it ended, without going beyond these platonic declarations.

¹ The meaning is somewhat obscure; the above is a literal translation. — TRANSLATOR.

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The taking of Paris and the restoration of the Bourbons relegated the whole German question to the background. The Treaty of Peace with France, concluded at Paris on May 13th, 1814, merely said that 'the disposition of the territories relinquished by His Most Christian Majesty, and the relations from which a real and durable system of equilibrium is to ensue for Europe, will be determined at the Congress on the bases agreed by the Allied Powers among themselves'. It was at Vienna, then, that the fate of Germany and the final outcome of all Stein's constitutional schemes would be settled.

We left our hero at the moment of his returning to his birthplace, to forget awhile the vast responsibilities that still rested on him. Some weeks of repose, and then he came back to realities. He saw around him the despair of a population cheated of the political reward that it had the right to expect after the immense effort it had made on the battlefields. 'Europe is pacified,' exclaimed Stein, 'and Germany alone amongst its peoples remains subject to a preposterous and humiliating tyranny. Is it thought that their tongues and pens are fettered, their arms paralysed?'

So once more the old statesman arose and threw himself into the fray. To the cause of German unity and liberty he devoted one more whole year of dogged work, incessant discussions, conferences and cabals. But this effort — the last — was to be as poor in results as those which had gone before. His participation in the preliminaries of the Congress of Vienna, and in the work of that illustrious gathering, was marked yet again by a long series of defeats and disillusionments. To set these forth in detail it would be necessary to retell the whole story of the diplomatic negotiations of 1814-15 — a useless task, and an unnecessary one, since Stein at no time played a leading part therein. It

will be enough to bring out the most salient features of his activity during this period.

Immediately upon Alexander's return from France to Germany in July 1814, Stein hastened to visit him at Bruchsal in Baden, and submitted the grievances of the German patriots. But the Tsar could do nothing. In any case he was unwilling to prejudge the decisions of the Congress, which was expected to assemble in October. He confined himself, therefore, to inviting Stein to take part in it as a member of the Russian delegation. The respite of some months thus afforded Stein utilized to resume contact with Hardenberg, Chancellor of Prussia, and to work out a new draft constitution in concert with him. This project was immediately forwarded to Vienna, to be studied by the representatives of Prussia, Austria and Hanover there, and — even before the Congress opened — all but twelve of the original forty-one paragraphs had disappeared. The smooth diplomats had hastened to eliminate the provisions concerning the rights of the local Diets, the guarantees to citizens, the compensation to be paid to the mediatized lords, etc. The Stein-Hardenberg draft proclaimed the Germanic Confederation to be indissoluble and eternal, but the diplomats struck out these words as binding the future too strictly. In their minds the Confederation, far from being a living symbol of national unity, was simply a political combination adapted to the conditions of the moment.

When the Congress opened, Stein soon realized the false position in which he stood. The prophet of German unity now appeared before all Europe as a mandatory of the Emperor of Russia, as one of the five members of that extraordinary delegation which included also the Corfiote Capo d'Istria, the Corsican Pozzo di Borgo, the Russified Rhine-German Nesselrode and — one authentic Russian — Count Rasumovski. Moreover, Alexander's personal

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radiation, his extraordinary charm and his great diplomatic capacities relegated all his collaborators to the background. The protagonists of the great game were Alexander, Metternich and Talleyrand. For each of them the German constitution was a tiresome question of the second order of importance, and it was handed over to a special commission called the 'German Committee', to which Alexander nominated Stein as Russian representative.

Rarely, even in the course of so chequered a career as his, had Stein found himself in an atmosphere less suited to his capacities, his temperament and his inclinations. Forty years ago, his mission to the Elector of Mainz had taught him about the little intrigues set on foot by pretty women and chamberlains, and the experience had led him to forswear the diplomatic career for ever. And now, in his declining years, he found himself breathing the same atmosphere on an infinitely larger stage. All Europe danced on the banks of the Danube, and the destinies of peoples were settled in the light interchange of a cotillion or even the whisperings of an alcove. Everything that was hateful to him — levity, petty intrigue, sex-appeal — displayed itself in the full light. As a *grand seigneur* of birth and education, he by no means despised the salon; he could even shine in it, provided that he dominated it enough to compel the conversation to take his own serious and solemnly impassioned tone. This proviso of his had been met, up to a certain point, in the Königsberg days, and completely in 1812 on the banks of the Neva. But at Vienna he felt himself lost in the vast mass of ministers, ambassadors, kings and princes that had gathered to share out, amusing themselves the while, the spoils of the Napoleonic empire. All these potentates and dignitaries were only faintly interested in the problems that agitated his soul. And he was not even a good dancer! 'The false situation in which I found myself,' he wrote, 'aroused in

me nothing less than a distaste for life. I had an influence, but I directed nothing. Moreover, those over whom my influence did extend were extremely imperfect men (*sic*). The pleasure-seeking and shallowness of some, the narrow minds and senile coldness of others, the stupidity, baseness and Metternich-cringing of yet others, and the frivolity of all—these were the causes that prevented the realization of any grand, noble or generous idea.'

From the first, the discussions of the German Committee revealed profound divergences between the Powers represented. Stein's programme was formulated in a letter to Alexander dated November 5th. 'It is in accord,' he wrote, 'with the principles of liberty and justice of the Allied Powers that Germany should enjoy political and civil liberty, that the sovereignty of the princes should be limited, that abuses of authority should cease, that a nobility that is old and illustrious through its deeds in arms, its influence in council, and its pre-eminence in the Church should not be handed over to the caprice of despots guided by a Jacobin and envious bureaucracy . . . that the rights of all should be guaranteed, and that Germany should cease to be a huge vessel of oppressors and oppressed.' These were not extravagant demands, but nevertheless the governments concerned found them inadmissible. Bavaria and Württemberg, as well as other states of the late Confederation of the Rhine, energetically opposed any and every restriction on their sovereignty, even to the limited extent contemplated in the famous twelve paragraphs. The Bavarian representative, Prince von Wrede, declared that his government was 'not directly interested in the Confederation'. 'The intention seems to be to make a single nation out of several completely different peoples like, for instance, Prussians and Bavarians,' said Frederick of Württemberg. There was one who had learned nothing and forgotten nothing! The princes would not hear of constitutional guarantees.

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They claimed for themselves the right to conclude separate treaties with foreign powers, or, if the case arose, to declare war on them. They wished to transform the Free German Confederation, loose as it was, into something still more vague, a sort of union of states presided over by a Directorate in which Prussia and Austria would be in a minority.

We are far indeed now from the original Steinian proposals. His first vision had been one of a single centralized Empire embracing the entire German people. Next he had accepted a partition between Prussia and Austria, and later again, the preservation of the principalities in the form of a confederation. This constitutional federation had in turn yielded to a confederation deriving from *international* law. And now, what was contemplated was a mere union, a sort of alliance for the moment between thirty-six independent sovereigns! And now the political rights of German citizens were not allowed even to be discussed. . . . It was too much.

With feverish activity he worked to save the situation. He argued that full sovereignty had been given to Bavaria and Württemberg 'in a purely conditional manner', and that all the other princes of the late Confederation of the Rhine 'had undertaken . . . to conform to the measures considered necessary, at the moment of making peace, for the maintenance of German independence'. In so doing, he held, the princes had admitted *a priori* certain limitations on their sovereignty. Further, the Treaties of Chaumont and Paris had proclaimed that it was the solemn will of Europe that Germany should be transformed into a federative State, and, that being so, could they now question the principle of federation itself? 'The German constitution,' he concluded, 'ought to state clearly (*a*) that the German Act of Federation is based on principles that give real powers to the general union, that the right to make war and peace, the right to decide disputes between the princes and

the right to guarantee the various territorial Constitutions are to be delegated to the Federation; (*b*) that political and civil liberty in the territories are protected by Estates, which have the right to approve laws and taxes and to supervise the agents of the executive: (*c*) that the rights of the mediatized lords and the nobility and those common to all Germans are fixed by the Federal pact.'

Equipped with these arguments, Stein induced the Tsar, in his capacity as a signatory of the Treaty of Paris, to intervene with the princelings in order to bring them to reason. At the same time a violent Press campaign, started in the *Rheinische Mercur* by the great journalist Görres, at the baron's instigation, aroused public opinion. Stein's numerous representations to the small German powers, taken up afresh by the great patriot Baron Gagern led to the formation of an anti-Bavarian *bloc*, and on November 16th the representatives of the small powers signed a protest, in which they demanded the limitation of sovereign rights and the re-establishment of the Imperial dignity. The Governments of Austria and Prussia declared on their side that they would never agree to the separatist demands of Bavaria and Württemberg. In the face of so unanimous an opposition, the representatives of these States were on the point of giving way.

But at the very moment when matters seemed to be moving towards an acceptable compromise, the entire work of the Congress was endangered by a grave dispute between Austria and Prussia on the question of Saxony.

Frederick William claimed the kingdom of Saxony for himself, and Russia had recognized the claim in a protocol signed on December 28th by Hardenberg and Humboldt for Prussia, and Nesselrode and Stein for Russia. Now, the opposition of Austria, worked up by Talleyrand's intrigues, threw everything into the melting-pot, and the dispute threatened to degenerate into a fratricidal war.

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At the outset of the discussion Stein took the side of Prussia. The fact that the definite dethronement of the King of Saxony would be an offence against the Law of Nations hardly affected him, for this king had been an ally of Napoleon, and, as we have seen, the Legitimist principle only held good for France. The necessity of recompensing Prussia outweighed, for him, all other considerations. And, after all, had he not a debt to discharge towards his adopted country?

But the problem was not one that touched his intimate convictions, and for once therefore he was able to keep cool. And as soon as he saw that the total annihilation of Saxony would meet with insuperable obstacles, he did not persevere. He became the zealous supporter of compromise and, in the event, played a particularly effective part in bringing about agreement.

As Prussia was not to have the kingdom of Saxony, compensation had to be found for her elsewhere, on the Rhine and in Poland. And thereupon Stein, who at the beginning of the Congress had inclined towards Talleyrand's thesis and even at one moment advocated the independence of Poland, suddenly changed his attitude. He declared that the Poles 'ought to make a sacrifice to the larger interests of Europe by way of proving their gratitude to the allies who had liberated them from the chains of Napoleon (*sic*)'. All the arguments that he had used in the Kalisz negotiations of 1813 were brought out again. 'A constitutional Poland,' he told the Tsar, 'is incompatible with a Russia governed despotically.' The Polish character was anarchic and revolutionary. The corruption of the grandees had brought about the country's miseries. 'It lacked that Third Estate which in all civilized countries is the guarantee of the culture, morals, and wealth of a nation.' The Emperor Alexander was surprised and vexed. The new pretensions of Prussia, thus supported by Stein,

endangered the Russian-Prussian friendship which was the basis of the whole coalition. 'You, too, have ranged yourself with my enemies, which I would not have expected of you,' exclaimed the Tsar to Stein on November 3rd. But, after long and painful discussions, the monarch once more let himself be convinced by his adviser, and in the end he resigned himself to sacrificing the idea of reconstructing a united Poland for the sake of European peace. He conceded to Prussia an important rectification of frontiers, and declared his willingness to transform Thorn and Cracow into free cities. And thus Prussia emerged from the Congress stronger than she had ever been. In lieu of the territories acquired in the Second and Third Partitions of Poland she gained half of Saxony, augmentations in Pomerania and vast provinces on the Rhine. She lost her Slav subjects, but on the other hand all her new territories were inhabited by Germans. . . . She became a purely German Power, at the same time as Austria was losing a great part of her German interests and consoling herself with unsubstantial advantages in Italy.

But before this point was reached, the Congress witnessed another dramatic intermezzo. On March 7th, 1815, Vienna learned that Napoleon had landed at Fréjus, and a few days later, on the 13th, the Great Powers launched against him the famous 'Bull of Excommunication', meting out to him the same measure as he had meted out to Stein.¹ Certain German historians, indeed, claim that the initiative came from Stein himself and, although documentary proof is wanting, the hypothesis is psychologically more than defensible. That he vigorously bestirred himself in the corridors to urge the most energetic action, there can be no shadow of doubt, for how could he have failed to do his best to provoke a reaction to this fresh 'overturning

¹ 'Strange revolution of things!' wrote Stein to his wife. 'The man who proscribed me on December 16th, 1808, is now put in a similar situation, but much more painfully for him, by a decision of the Great Powers.'

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of France, a consequence of the profound corruption of the nation', and this 'tyrant preparing joyfully for a new war of conquest and pillage'? 'The peoples,' he wrote, 'demand of their sovereigns, and rightly, that an account shall be rendered to them for the blood they have shed and the property they have sacrificed, in repelling the insolent and greedy Frenchman.'

It was the last act of European politics in which Stein was directly concerned, as if Fate had wished to point out once more that his historical role was limited to his struggle against Napoleon.

In the midst of all the agitations caused by the Saxon and Polish problems and the reappearance of Napoleon, the only subject that lay truly near his heart—the Constitution of Germany—had once more been pushed into the background.

After one more effort to re-establish the Imperial dignity in a memoir dated February 17th, he realized, as the spring wore on, that he had nothing to expect from the Congress. He resigned, and left Vienna on May 28th, without waiting for the end of the deliberations. And it was in his Nassau home that he heard of the final defeat of his great adversary on that field of Waterloo where the squares of the Imperial Guard were broken by those Krümper and Landwehr troops that years ago he had helped to create.¹

And it was in his home, too, that he learned the decisions of the Congress of Vienna on the subject of the German constitution. According to these, which were embodied in the final Act of June 9th, 1815, the thirty-four princes and four free cities of Germany formed a Confederation 'for the maintenance of the internal and external security of Germany, and the independence and inviolability of the Confederated States'. A Federal Diet, *composed of diplomats*

¹ A regiment of *Krümper*, two of Silesian Landwehr and an Osnabrück Landwehr battalion, at Rancmont.

each representing a State, and presided over by Austria, was entrusted with the affairs of the Confederation. The Confederated States might not contract any engagement that was contrary to the security of the Confederation, but, under this reserve, they could even contract alliances. And this was all that was left of the united and centralized German Empire that was to guarantee to its citizens the dignity of the nation and the rights of man! The principle of German unity alone was saved — for the rest, the Congress of Vienna ended, as Stein himself put it, 'in a farce'. It was the utter collapse of his dream.

A last disillusionment awaited the old statesman when he went to Paris, at Hardenberg's urgent request, to support the Prussian Minister's territorial claims before Alexander. Hardenberg had stated his view in the famous declaration of August 4th: 'If we wish for a durable peace and France desires it as sincerely as we, she should restore to her German neighbours the line of defence that she has taken from them — Alsace, the fortifications of the Low Countries, the Meuse, the Moselle, and the Saar. France's true line of defence is the Vosges and the double line of fortresses from the Meuse to the sea. So long as France is not on this frontier, she will not keep quiet. Providence has granted us a unique opportunity of establishing a durable peace for the good of Europe and of France. If we let this occasion pass, torrents of blood will be poured out in the future, and the cry of the unhappy victims will demand justice on us.'

Needless to say, Stein fully shared these views — already in 1812 he had written that the German Reich ought to include the Meuse, Luxemburg, the Moselle, the Vosges, and even Switzerland. 'The first Treaty of Paris,' he had declared on the morrow of Napoleon's return from Elba, 'has left to France a military power that is a constant threat to the rest of Europe. Everyone is now ready to recognize this.' But Alexander did not understand the matter so.

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His reception of his former adviser and confidant was ice-cold. He declared himself outraged by the depredations and acts of violence that the Prussian troops had once more committed, and opposed a formal veto upon any new spoliation of France. 'The safeguarding of right,' he said, 'is a better security for States than frontier fortresses.' The game was lost. Unable to understand Alexander's ideas (which incidentally were perfectly just) Stein exclaimed, 'All the Russians want is that we should remain vulnerable.' He did however succeed, after long and difficult negotiations, in obtaining one concession that seemed to him secondary, but was one day to be of immense significance — the cession of the Saar.

With that, Stein disappeared for ever from the European political scene. Proposals were made to him by Prussia and by Austria, each wishing him to represent her in the new Diet, over which he was to preside. But he declined and retired for good to his estates, where he spent the last fifteen years of his life. 'When the storm had died down,' wrote Uvarov, 'when the risen flood had returned to its bed, we saw the stout workmen, the sturdy defenders of order, left standing on the banks that they had preserved at the cost of a thousand heroic efforts.'

For these fifteen years he was to be an inactive witness of the new political evolution of Europe. He was to see the German princes falling back into the old errors, Metternich's reactionary policy triumphing, his own sovereign, the King of Prussia, failing to redeem the solemn promises made to his people. He was to live long enough, even, to see the fall of the Bourbons in the July Revolution.

Did he die, as Count Uvarov would have us think, 'with grief in his soul and anger in his face at the sight of what had been made of Germany'? This, we think, is at least an exaggeration. At first, certainly, his despair was acute in

the extreme. The Duc de Broglie of the day, in his memoirs, tells how Stein visited him at Coppet in Switzerland in 1816. 'M. de Stein is a German of tall stature, strong and robustly corpulent. His colour is high, his eye alert, his speech hard and jerky. His look and language was eloquent of his indignation with the German sovereigns, big and little, who after the victory had the pretension to re-establish absolute power, betray the promises made to their peoples, and take to themselves the whole fruit of a struggle that they had neither begun nor maintained. He expressed the greatest contempt for his own sovereign, the Prussian court, and the German bureaucracy. All was lost, he said, after it had been regained at the cost of torrents of blood. He himself, a man of means and station, who had a hundred times risked his life, and suffered persecution, expatriation and confiscation for these ingrates, could only shake the dust off his feet and wrap his head in his mantle.' Stein's resentment, indeed, was so outspoken as to shock the Duc. 'I thought his indignation natural and his resentment justified, but it seemed to me that its expression was both excessive and out of place in a foreign country and particularly before Frenchmen, who might well, without being over malicious, be tempted to delight in the disappointments of their conquerors.'

This first access of despair was too intense to last. Time is a great healer, and to Stein, as to so many others, old age brought appeasement and serenity. 'The last time I saw him at Nassau,' says Nikolai Turgenev, 'he talked to me at length on the affairs of this world, and ended by saying to me that one must resign oneself, and that Providence, too, seemed to wish that it should be so. . . . After talking with him for an hour I felt my spirit tranquillized for a long time.'

'I have now to cope with two problems, inactivity and old age,' so he defined the new phase of his life. In the calm

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of his retreat, he entered upon a healthy 'patriarchal and antediluvian' life that enabled him to keep his strength and good health to a ripe age. 'I hunt with friends, and the sound of the horns, the barking of the dogs, and the report of the guns in the quiet solitude of the woods seem to me more enjoyable than the noise of the towns one stays in,' he wrote to Baron von Gagern on September 16th, 1818. He had the sorrow of losing his wife, at the age of forty-seven, on September 14th, 1819. Twelve years still remained to him. In 1824 J. F. Böhme wrote, 'Stein is as full of ardour and strength as a young man. No tempest in the moral world or the physical could shake him,' and some years still were to pass before, in January, 1828, he at last admitted to his sister Marianne, 'I feel my strength to be failing'.

As for the 'problem' of inactivity, at no time in this last long phase had he reason to complain of being unoccupied. Once back on the soil, he took his responsibilities as a great landlord very seriously, and threw himself ardently into the management of his patrimony. He got rid of the land he owned in West Prussia, close to the new Polish frontier, and obtained from the Prussian Government in exchange the former ecclesiastical domain of Kappenberg in Westphalia. He made an inhabitable house out of the fine abbey, with its setting of splendid oaks and rich fields, and made it his favourite residence. At the same time he busied himself with beautifying the family house in Nassau, on to which he built a large tower in memory of the War of Liberation. It was a heteroclite mixture of Empire and misunderstood Gothic, and as such 'an outward testimony to the contradictions of his own ideology'.¹ He adorned his salon with a series of pictures illustrative of the most memorable events of German history. And in the middle was a bust of himself by the great German sculptor

¹ Ritter, *Stein*, II, 307.

Rauch, with, facing it, one of his immortal opponent Napoleon Bonaparte. In this salon he was wont to sit meditating on his own past and studying more and more seriously the past of Germany.

A long conversation with Goethe, on a chance meeting in the shadow of Cologne Cathedral, had awakened in him the wish to probe more deeply than he had done into the origins of the Germanic civilization. Shortly afterwards, in giving history lessons to his youngest daughter, he discovered the insufficiency of the published documentation on the German Middle Ages. And at once there was a new field of congenial activity. All the fervour, energy and passion that was left in the old statesman was thenceforth devoted to a vast scientific enterprise. He created and organized a historical society which, with the support of generous donations (Stein's own being amongst the most generous) and the devoted assistance of a great scholar, G. H. Pertz (who was to be Stein's first biographer), set itself to publish in full all documents relating to the history of Germany since Charlemagne. The first volume appeared in 1826 and eighty more in the next hundred years. The *Monumenta Germaniae*, with their proud motto, *Sanctus amor patriae dat animum*, will ever be, for the scholar, a 'colossal' and imperishable monument erected by Stein with his own hands to his own memory. No student of Germany can do without the imposing rank of volumes that occupy whole shelves in the great reading-room of the Bibliothèque Nationale.

'The Revolution,' says A. Sorel, 'which in France consisted in breaking with the past and making a veritable principle of contempt for it, consisted for the Germans in re-tying ties broken centuries ago and re-establishing ancestor-worship. The French demolished their Bastille and burnt their charters. The Germans restored their castles and collected their archives'.

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At the same time, though Stein had refused to take any active part in the events of the period, he in no wise detached himself from them. Politician at heart as he had been, so he would be to his last breath. Forced away from day-to-day politics, he became, even during his lifetime, a symbolic figure. The German sovereigns loaded him with honours — the St. Stephen from the Emperor of Austria, the Black Eagle from the King of Prussia, each the highest that they could give. Certain of the German princes sought the old statesman's counsel, and under his influence gave their peoples Constitutional Charters — first among them the Duke of Nassau, in fear no doubt of the old baron's influence on the population around him; then the young King of Württemberg, son of the 'despot' whom Stein had overwhelmed with his invective. Statesmen, writers, thinkers, came from every corner of Germany to do homage to the old servant of the national cause and exchange ideas with him. Countless letters and memoirs of the period remain to tell us of these interviews, and by their aid we can put the last touches to the portrait of a great statesman.

At the base of all his political conceptions there was always the love of the German past. In the words of Uvarov: 'Stein saw only Germany, his beautiful ideal country wherein figured in turn the high barons justiciars of the Empire, the knightly defenders of the weak and the orphan, the elected and selected Emperor, the free States in a chain from Alsace to East Prussia — an immense and filmy setting into which one could put, at one's pleasure, the ideas of our own time, the traditions of the Hohenstaufen period, the sword of Frederick the Great and the leather jerkin of Gustavus Adolphus alike . . . a vision even less accessible to the demagogues of Young Germany than to the Radicals of the French press.'

'Just a baron,' the young men said of him, according to

Arndt. They had failed to understand him. To the end of his days he was the determined enemy of despotism and officialism. "The princes are the real Jacobins, it is they who create discontent and irritation." "The real enemies of the good cause are the functionaries. . . . We live in a period of transition. We have not to destroy the heritage of the past, but to adapt it to the necessities of the time. It is indispensable that we should oppose not only the fantasies of the democrats, but also the activity of the paid defenders of princely despotism" (to Arndt, January 5th, 1818). "Why should a bureaucratic government be preferable to one in which the legislative functions are entrusted to representatives of the different classes of society, working without any remuneration, for the good of the community?" (to Humboldt, March 30th, 1822).

While, however, he refused to compromise with Reaction, he was even less disposed to take the path of democratic Liberalism. He was a declared opponent of the parliamentary regime. "How does one set about getting a majority?" he wondered aloud. "Buy it, as in England? Or is a faction to be permitted to impose itself on the whole Assembly, as in France?" He believed that Parliamentaryism could only lead to 'the undermining of religious sentiment and to disorder in the finances'. In 1826, on the first convocation of the Provincial Diet in Westphalia, Stein was called upon to preside over it. He was certainly the most extraordinary President who ever managed a representative assembly. His age, rank and fame overpowered all the members, and he, on his side, did not miss an opportunity of giving rein to his authoritarian temperament. Before the opening session one deputy, a hotel-keeper by occupation, came to consult him as to the line of conduct he should adopt: 'You have only to keep quiet,' was the reply, 'and listen to what more intelligent people have to say.' During the debates, another deputy

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asked leave to read a document: 'Be brief, and at any rate say something intelligent. So far I have only heard nonsense from you,' was Stein's rejoinder. Parliamentaryism of a rather special sort! His democratic contemporaries could not get over it, though in our own days he would very likely have been applauded.

On the eve of a great industrial revolution, Stein stood for the maintenance of peasant properties and noble estates in due proportion. 'The breaking-up of peasant land, as we see it in France and the Rhineland, will engender the proletariat,' he wrote to Gagern on March 31st, 1831. He was convinced that the preservation of a healthy country population was indispensable for the 'maintenance of morals and the defence of the country'. He declined to admit that all citizens were completely equal. 'Aristocracy will never die, its principle is too deeply anchored in the human soul. It is found everywhere, even in the Canton of Schwyz; in spite of the attachment of the Swiss to democracy, the *Messieurs* are distinguished from the mass. No doubt there are different ways of interpreting the word "aristocracy" — real nobility has other things to do than idling and hunting.'

The old statesman's views on foreign politics were equally unfashionable. He joyfully welcomed the Holy Alliance, that pact so detested by all libertarians. 'For the first time for centuries,' he wrote, 'courage has been found to proclaim that Christian love is the bond that should unite all nations.' Yet he remained staunch as ever to the principle of nationality, against which this very Holy Alliance fought with all its might. The risings of the Greeks, the Irish, the Poles, roused him to enthusiasm. For years he subscribed generously to the funds of the Greek insurgents, and shortly before his death he was heard to cry, 'They are fighting in Poland, and I am pinned here.' Had he forgotten the innumerable representations he had

made to the Tsar Alexander against the proclamation of Polish independence? Did the old fighter really contemplate raising his hand against Nicholas, the brother of his benefactor? Who can say?

At a century's distance we can judge Stein's ideas quite otherwise than it was possible for his contemporaries. What appeared to them as inconsistency does not now strike us as such. Stein was simply pointing out to humanity a different road from that of nineteenth-century Western Liberation. He was combating that disintegration of society that was becoming the characteristic of the rising democracy. The notion of class-war he neither understood nor tolerated. Against rationalism he set up religious faith, against the cult of the individual that of the collectivity, against the principles of the democratic state that of the national and corporative state, against the notion of progress that of dynamic *élan*. 'Stein lighted the fire too soon,' remarked the Duc de Broglie, his host of 1816. His ideas were not those of his time; either they lagged behind it or they were a whole century ahead of it. Not without cause do the National Socialists of Hitler count him among their precursors.

July 1830. Stein is seventy-one. He rarely leaves his estate now. Loneliness is closing on him. Most of the old comrades of the fighting days are dead. The two daughters who for years had enlivened the house have married and left home. Reverting to the tastes of his youth, he devotes himself to reading French authors. He studies Guizot and Cousin with eager interest. He finds the French 'calmed and sobered by their misfortunes'. But lo! one evening a visitor tells him the news of the day. 'Revolution in Paris.' 'Once more this evil nation is going to throw Europe into confusion,' exclaims the old man, 'if it had to happen, I should have preferred it to wait till I am dead.' The ingrained hate wakes afresh in the old fighter's soul.

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Again, as of old, he storms at this 'vain, selfish, rapacious, irreligious' people. 'I detest the French,' he said to Bodelschwingh, 'as much as a Christian is allowed to hate.' He could not get over the fall of the dynasty that he had helped to restore to the throne. 'If I had been a French deputy, I should have done all I could to maintain the Royal power. Never would I have permitted myself to choose another King, for I should not have thought myself entitled to do so. Liberal opinion regards Legitimism as stupid, but on the same line of argument we shall come to regard the rights of property and inheritance as stupid also.' He is astonished that European opinion is so indulgent towards the French. 'It has all been forgotten,' he writes to Gagern, 'all their devastations, their pillagings. They must now, forsooth, be strengthened; we are invited to worship on our knees this so-called fine, noble, great and illustrious nation. The devil take them!' It was the last cry of hatred of the implacable 'ENEMY OF FRANCE'.

June 1831. Still the same setting — the old abbey, the beautiful garden, rich red soil of Westphalia. Stein feels death at hand. His soul is assailed by sombre presentiments. 'We have still to do with a generation accustomed to monarchical and bureaucratic forms,' he had written a few months before to his old friend Field-Marshal Gneisenau, 'but another generation is rising. It is penetrating every channel of public life; it is forming itself under the influence of modern history, of journals and political pamphlets. It is animated by young forces, ambitions and jealousies, athirst for action. Religious principles are undermined by rationalism. All over Europe the fires of political passion are smouldering under the ashes. It were better to direct this fire than to let it run wild on its destructive career.' He foresees for Germany, not only great social upheavals, but also external dangers. The master of

Kappenberg, as he waits for death under the shadow of its ancient oaks, feels his life's work unachieved, his dream still far from fulfilment.

For even he, so often looked upon as a visionary, was not possessed, any more than other human beings, of the gift of penetrating the future's secrets.

He died on June 29th, 1831. Forty years later, to the sound of drums and fifes, Queen Louise's son, William of Hohenzollern, was proclaimed German Emperor, on enemy soil, in the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles. Two generations pass, and the 'thirty-four despots' vanish on the morrow of a disastrous war. Twenty years more, and a child of the people arises, amidst the acclamations of the crowd, and sets up as the definitive uniter of Germany.

Age-long dream of the Reich, ever-vanishing shadow that the German people ever pursues!

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